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Spirit and form

SPIRIT AND FORM.

SPIRIT AND FORM:

*SERMONS PREACHED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF LEATHERHEAD.*

BY



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DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION,
TO HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,
WITH A GRATEFUL SENSE
OF THE WISDOM AND CHARITY WITH WHICH
FOR THIRTEEN YEARS HE HAS GUIDED THE COUNSELS OF
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

THE following sermons (with two or three exceptions) were preached in the parish church of Leatherhead by invitation of the late and the present Vicar, and were written for the congregation to which they were addressed.

The writer has attempted, (1) to regard the subjects of them from the point of view of his hearers ; (2) to mitigate some of the difficulties occasioned by the contrasts of Faith and Experience ; and (3) to compare the morality of the New Testament with some of the accepted usages of society.

The earlier sermons will be found generally to be devoted to the second of these objects, and those in the latter part of the volume to the third.

They are published in deference to opinions which the writer has reason to respect, and not from any notion on his part that there is anything in them which has not been said before and better.

E. C. H.

LEATHERHEAD,
February 15, 1881.

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SERMONS.

MAN'S JUDGMENT OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

ST. JOHN ix. 2.—“ *Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind ?* ”

PEOPLE who are at all past middle life may remember a time when calamities were much more commonly set down as “judgments” than they are now. The verdict of mankind used to be much less hesitating than it has since become in declaring particular sufferings to be the consequences of special faults. Moral story-books written for children inculcated this lesson—the idle, disobedient, or vicious child came to a bad end ; but an end often in no way resulting from his character or career, and in no way connected with his peculiar fault. And popular judgment went with them, for it was equally careless of any causal connexion between the suffering and the sin ; if any evil befell those who were committing or had committed any sin, it was a judgment. If the ice broke or a boat upset on a Sunday, it was a judgment for Sabbath-breaking ; though it was evident that, as a matter of

course, more people were drowned on other days of the week, when they could not be accused of breaking the fourth commandment at all events. The feeling, however mistaken in expression, is entitled to respect. It is not only true, but it is a truth most important to remember and proclaim, that God does signify and maintain His moral government of us by riveting sorrow upon sin. The general course of human events which does upon the whole bring happiness to well-doing, and suffering upon evil-doing, is one of the strongest indications that we live under the rule not merely of a Governor, but of a moral Governor.

Mistakes arise in the application of this general truth. The difficulty of all principles is to apply them to practice. But it was a difficulty evidently little felt by those who were ready with their hasty verdicts on the occurrence of any disaster; and they have produced their natural crop of evil. They weakened the wholesome lesson of suffering, which was the obvious result of wrong, by the uncertainty they begat as to the consequences of action. And they awakened a strong reaction against the belief in any moral government at all. "What," it might be asked—and it was asked—"must be the moral character of a Ruler who could punish faults in such a way that no one could see any connexion between the fault and the punishment?" or "in such a way that a little more skill or caution would have averted the penalty altogether, though the fault would have been the

same?" Some of the disbelief of our own day is no doubt due to the assumption of those who claimed to know more of the mind of God than He has shown to us by the order of nature or in the writings of revelation. And it cannot be said that this habit of declaring that calamities not only are judgments, but of declaring of what sins they are judgments, quite independent of any connexion of cause and effect between the fault and the punishment, is yet extinct. The subject has been forced upon public notice within the last few weeks by a conspicuous utterance.

It was stated that the excessive rainfall of this summer,* was a judgment of God upon us as a nation for certain sins, public and private, individual and national, of which we are only too conscious, and of which we hear from the pulpit, the press, and the platform.

There is, of course, no possibility of proving or of disproving such an assertion; and it may be freely conceded, without venturing to say that such a season is a punishment for faults in no way connected with it, that such a period of suffering is well adapted for making men think seriously of the habits and feelings engendered by a state of prosperity, and that it may in all probability be the will of God that we should use it so. But still it seems especially dangerous teaching. If a physical phenomenon which, as far as we know, no conduct on our part could produce or avert is proclaimed to be the penalty

of vices which have their certain and corresponding results of evil, will not the known penalties lose much, if not all, of their deterring efficacy? If the penalty, as in this case, falls heaviest on those who have the least share in the stated national faults and the least tendency towards and opportunity of the specified private vices, will it not weaken faith in any moral government at all? It will be said, of course, that those who thus trace calamities to their source in wrong have the authority of the Old Testament to rest upon; where we find war, famine, and pestilences following as punishments for idolatry and other sins which have no natural tendency to produce such results, except in so far as the disunion and consequent weakness produced by idolatry, together with the loss of enthusiasm to a nation with such a history as that of the Jews, were likely to tempt an invader; and it will as naturally be added, that the New Testament dispensation is the continuation and development of the Old, and that we claim to be living as much under Divine government as the Jews were. All this is true; but one important factor is omitted, viz. that the Jews had in the prophets a body of teachers commissioned, as they believed, to declare the mind of God to them, and who professed on each occasion both to foretell the results of particular conduct and to assign them to their cause when they occurred.

Now we have no teachers whom we believe to be empowered to tell us that pestilence, drought, or

flood are the penalties of presumption, aggression, injustice, or extravagance. There may be men of sufficient moral insight to discern that such offences must bring their evil consequences, and when the natural results occur by way of moral or physical sequence their intuition is allowed and commended; but no one without Divine authority can assert that a calamity is the result of conduct which has no moral or physical tendency to produce it. There are certain classes of sins which do bring down a punishment closely connected with themselves. No one, for instance, can hesitate to connect the horrors of the Reign of Terror in France with the long period of tyranny and oppression which preceded it; and outbreaks of cholera or diphtheria appear as the natural result of neglect of the conditions of health.

Such visitations when they occur are in the strictest sense judgments of God; occurring in the way of physical sequence, they are the expression of His mind about the events which have produced them. The present depression in trade is thought by many persons competent to form an opinion, to be the natural result of certain courses of action which preceded it. But bad weather and bad harvests, as they cannot be traced to human conduct, and as no one is authorized to declare their penal character, do not convey the same lesson; whatever use serious-minded persons may derive from them as seasons and opportunities for reflexion.

There are, in fact, considerations of an *à priori* kind

which create great difficulty in declaring the penal character of calamity, and which are calculated to make a thoughtful person pause before he commits himself to such an assertion. In the first place, there is a sense in which we do not know God, and in which He is unknowable. We know Him where we come in contact with Him; at the point of tangent, that is, in a vast sphere of Being. We know Him by His relations to us of Creator, Father, Redeemer, Inspirer, and Moral Governor. But "these are but broken lights of Thee, and Thou, O Lord, art more than they." Of His great purposes for us and for the world in the future we are ignorant; "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." This may well make many of His dealings with us unaccountable.

Again, there is not only a complexity of natures in ourselves—of the spiritual and the animal natures—but there is also the crossing and the interaction of the physical and the divine order in the world, with their consequent penalties for the infraction of either. We are related to God as individual souls to the Father of spirits; we are related to the Creator as parts of His material universe. We may be good in one relation and bad in another. We may be loving and docile children of the Father; useless or even mischievous members of the great order of nature. On the other hand, we may confer great material benefits on the world and be an indispensable element in progress; and yet be unloving, impatient, or impure. Men may

be sagacious in the conduct of worldly business, and mere children in the development of a moral nature ; they may have the temper of angels, and wreck every scheme they put their hand to. How is the success which is the natural reward of conformity to the laws of material nature to be granted without shocking the moral sense ? how can the misfortunes of the unworldly be regarded without a feeling of injustice ? Offences against the order of nature we feel must bring their punishment, whether they are the imprudences of a good man or the deliberate ill-will of a vicious one ; and her remorseless onward march must crush the sinner and the saint with impartial sternness. Nor can the greatest benefactors of their species be exempted by world-wide services from the consequences of spiritual omissions or transgressions. Secret faults must bring their secret penalties in the midst of success and renown. Evil thoughts must ensure their own predominance and make the mind powerless to resist them. The temper which has been the terror of others must become a torture to ourselves. Some of these penalties may not be felt here ; there are men to whom their evil thoughts are the reverse of suffering ; and others who rejoice in observing the influence of a fierce temper ; but it is impossible to believe that this is the will of God about us. Such a state of things demands the belief in a more spiritual existence—in which spiritual forces may have more free play, and in which there may be a possibility of a man's ridding himself of his evil by becoming con-

scious of it. These are some of the difficulties we should expect to encounter in assigning sufferings as the consequences of faults, and experience of human life by no means tends to remove them. Its tendency is rather to add to the number.

Sometimes, in the case both of nations and of individuals, punishment seems to halt, so that it never overtakes its victim. Sometimes periods of prosperity appear to follow upon a national aggression, or on a successful but not illegal fraud. Some men are so indifferent or insensible that they suffer nothing from a loss of reputation, which would be the acutest anguish to others. Some are so sensitive and self-tormenting that they are made miserable by the recollection of blunders or of vices, which would glide off the better-armoured conscience of duller natures. The reckless youth ruins his health by an unguarded excess, the cautious voluptuary is enabled to indulge himself to the last. Some men are always prosperous in spite of conduct, to others no merit can bring success. Some are serene in spite of many causes for remorse; some are happy in spite of hard-heartedness. Cases like these puzzle the judgment; and when we try to "justify the ways of God to men," to bring all cases of suffering under the wide law of sorrow following upon sin, of well-being following upon well-doing, we are brought up by the inherent difficulty of coming to general conclusions, and by the numberless cases which refuse to fall under our general rule. "We also see the wicked in such pros-

perity;" we are not able to say that we never "saw the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." And we, too, are reminded, as many generations of men have been before us, of the lesson of the Book of Job, and of the hasty generalization of his friends. This book, which almost exhausts all that can be said on the subject, shows us his friends arriving at what they thought a satisfactory account of his sufferings; they went beyond the usual limit of the confident expounders of human experience, and inferred that the patriarch must have sinned because he was suffering. His consciousness of integrity rejected this interpretation, and they were taught that it is not so easy to account for things as they thought. "Happy is he who is able to discern the causes of things!" but perhaps he is happier who is content, amid the puzzles of the world, to wait for light; who is able, amid the manifold difficulties of faith, to believe in the righteousness of God, and in the ultimate triumph of good.

It does not follow that calamities are without their purpose because we cannot trace them back to sin; that they are unjust because the innocent suffer with the guilty. In most cases the righteous would be the first to acknowledge their justice, and the quickest to reap from them their appropriate spiritual harvest. The danger and the mistake arise when we attempt to point their moral in the case of others, without the guidance of any connexion of cause and effect between the conduct and the suffering. There are few good

men who could not find in any private misfortune or national disaster food for reflection and matter for self-reproach. There are few whom the sight of triumphant evil or suffering innocence would not remind of their own spiritual nature ; of the mixed character of this world ; of the prospect of a more spiritual existence which may explain many of the riddles of this life ; in which the strictness of moral causation may be as obvious as we have learnt from science that the order of physical causation is in this. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of this contribution from science to the cause of religion. It is not only a clear warning against the abuse of nature or the violation of its laws, and so one of the most powerful sanctions of morality ; but it is an indirect assurance that we may trust the Mind which has imposed this strictness of causation on the material world for a like rigid order in the moral and spiritual world also. Causes may seem a long time in producing their effects. Conduct may seem to fail in bringing happiness. Vast periods of time are required to bring about the births of nature, and yet they never fail ; is it likely that moral and spiritual results will be less certain in a sphere of being in which there are none of the opposing influences that modify the operation of natural laws ?

We are links in a long chain, and there is a vast order to take into account ; it is not wonderful that we should not be able to catalogue every phenomenon, to assign every effect to its cause. The difficulty of

connecting sorrow with sin in particular cases might teach us modesty and caution in applying the law to others; our certainty of its general truth ought to be the support of morality and the defence against temptation to ourselves. Every examination of the conditions of human existence results in a confession of ignorance, but without ignorance there can be no faith. As man can have no higher aim and no higher state than righteousness, so, amid the puzzles of life and the failure of expectations, faith can find no higher expression than the first and most famous of all confessions of faith, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is possible for the confession of ignorance to have another issue. It may issue in the resolve to care nothing about that of which we can know nothing, but this is to reject the many indications of a Divine order which permeate life like a golden thread in a tissue. There are signs enough of judgment in the issues of human affairs without the artificial adjustments of those for whom Divine penalties are not clear enough without their explanations; who cannot wait to see the end, and want the Judge of all the earth to minister justice according to their notions of it. And those who stand at the opposite pole in religious thought, who can see only a law of physical causation at work in the world, and who would describe the varying conditions of the spirit of man as the results of molecular change, these might be led to reflect that a system in which physical sequence is one of the

firmest supports of moral order, in which material change is the minister of spiritual penalties and the dispenser of spiritual joys, although appearing as a rigid and unchangeable order, may be the plastic instrument of a righteous will.

LAW AND LOVE.

ST. JOHN iv. 48.—“*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*”

THIS is one of our Saviour's many protests against those who asked Him for a sign of His mission. He had had some experience of this temper already. On His first visit to Jerusalem He was met with the question, “What sign showest Thou unto us?” after the force of His personality had made Him of sufficient importance to test His pretensions. And before He left the town Nicodemus—liberal-minded as he was for a Pharisee—can get no further than this inference, “No man can do these miracles except God be with him.” The Saviour's answer, “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” *i.e.* the Spirit of God alone can enable a man to see the true and permanent signs of the kingdom of God—“that which is born of the flesh,” like your inference from miracles, “is flesh,” the deeper discernment of the kingdom of God in the life and spirit of a man is born of the Spirit;—this answer is another expression of the same distaste for the same temper. And he encounters it again among the Samaritans who

believed on Him for the saying of the woman, "He told me all that I ever did."

Perhaps it was because He was at Cana (where His first miracle gave Him a local renown) when the nobleman came to Him, that He suspected the presence of the same feeling in him. He may have felt that He was associated in the minds of Galileans with this wonder, and have determined to make one more effort to base their belief on true grounds.

The sign that He was so repeatedly asked for was no doubt something different from His miracles of healing; and He indicates this when He answers those who ask for one according to their folly—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up;" an answer intended, no doubt, at once to mystify and to condemn men who could see no signs of a Divine mission in His words and works.

His miracles of healing were an inevitable issue of His personality and office; necessary tokens of the new reign of love; forecasts of the wonders that human love and care were to work for the benefit of man when the same spirit had penetrated the world, that possessed Him. But He was conscious of the danger that lay in them. He knew how surely men would be blind to the regular and permanent beneficence of His life among them, and would be attracted by exceptional mercies; how likely they were to be insensible to the influence of His character, and to be stirred by manifestations of His power. He knew how transient this enthusiasm was; how little like

the slow and sure development of the seed in the ground, and the leaven in the meal, to which He compared the growth of the kingdom of God. To have been followed and regarded as a worker of miracles merely would have marred His whole career. He seems to have felt this; for He was chary of working miracles; He was exacting in the conditions on which alone He would work them; He was precise and authoritative in forbidding their publication. He is always betraying this anxiety about any mistake being made about His office. It was one part of His office to show men what they ought to do for one another—to show them the source of that love and power which was to accomplish even “greater works” of the same sort when He was gone away. But to fill men with the spirit to go and do likewise, and not to heal their diseases, was the great work of the Saviour of the world. And there was danger that His reputation as a Healer should overshadow His office as a Redeemer, as a Teacher, and as an Example to men. Some such feelings as these may have suggested His remark to the father who came to Him in an agony about his son. Sign-seeking was a weakness of the people He lived amongst; the whole history of their race had begotten in them the expectation of the marvellous, and the belief in special interpositions in their behalf. No doubt our Lord’s wonderful career among them had served to stimulate an already deeply rooted feeling; it is a weakness not confined to Jews, but common to mankind. The

savage who sees in an eclipse a sign of the power of God which he fails to see in the regular rising and setting of the sun; the believer in "special providences" who finds a stronger reason for belief in some fancied interposition in his favour than in the Providence which adapts the order of the solar system to the steady progress of his race, exhibit alike the same temper. It is the temper against which our Lord utters His protest. It is a declaration by Him of the mind of God against a mistaken view of His way of ordering the universe.

Viewing both nature and religion as proceeding from Him, we may expect to find the same system at work in both. Nature is more and more being clearly revealed to us as a vast order; showing evident signs, in its highest organizations, of having been originated by a ruling will, and proceeding in its unbroken march according to fixed laws. Throughout its endless operations we see means used to attain ends and causes producing effects, and as far as can be ascertained, no end without a means, no effect without a cause. We find ourselves obliged to conform to these laws, our will is limited by them; or again, they are the means by which our will is alone able to pass into act. We can attain no end without means; we can originate no effect without a cause; we can hinder no cause from producing its effect. To those who realize the condition of things by which they are surrounded it presents itself sometimes as a reason for thankfulness, sometimes as a reason for despair. But men

are for the most part so used to take the immutability of nature as a matter of course, that little thankfulness is felt for it, though very different feelings would be soon expressed at any irregularity in its operations. Its very order has banished the idea of a Living Will beyond it.

Every operation and arrangement of life is based upon the conviction of this unchangeableness—but its beneficence ascends above convenience. Without law and order in nature ; if causes could not be trusted to produce effects ; if ends could be reached without the necessity of preceding means adapted to them, not only would all the works of man come to an end, but the earth would cease to be a place of discipline for the spirits of men. The course of nature is conformed to ; is submitted to ; is made use of ; but it seldom evokes any feeling of trust in the Mind which made it proceed in such an unbroken order. It is not often appealed to as almost the best ground for that confidence in God which is the foundation of religion. It is even common to go beyond this, and to find in this irresistible, or as it seems to some, remorseless, march of nature a reason for despair. Men are impatient of this iron rule ; they cannot get outside it ; they long to ascend beyond it into a Living Presence where its laws are broken, and where they can have the happiness of obedience to a Personal Will. They speculate on the beginnings of this system of things, and imagine that, in a more free communion with the Great Author before He had imprisoned human wills

in an economy, service would have been easier, love more spontaneous, devotion more personal, God more near. But as we ascend the course of time and try to realize the beginning of things, we find ourselves no nearer to God. If we have failed to find Him in nature all about us, we should not find Him there. If we cannot see Him in the perfect adaptation of His works to the wants and the longings of men, we should not find Him in the rudiments of matter or in primary organisms. And if in the regular course of nature's operations men often fail to see the presence of God ; in the exceptional calamities and disasters of life and nature they often cry out against His absence. They miss, as they think, the presence of a Living Ruler who would have averted the consequences of the greed or carelessness of men. They cry out that is, because causes have produced their inevitable effects. An accident occasions a wholesale destruction of human life, and men, who would have thought little of the death of two or three times the number of men in battle, secretly or openly arraign the providence of God for permitting it. This is only because they can trace the effect to human agency more clearly in one case than in another ; though there is no form of suffering in which the innocent suffer for the guilty on a larger scale than in a battle. They are perhaps mourning the loss of an innocent victim of other men's ambition or recklessness, or they are rejoicing over the providential escape of a relation from the same calamity. In neither case is the providence of

God in allowing causes to produce their natural effects discerned. Those who mourn over a loss and lay the blame on God for not interfering to prevent it, and those who think that an escape was an interposition of Providence, miss the true lesson of such sufferings.

We are being taught here; and we are hard to teach; and the most precious teaching of such events is that Nature will not allow her laws to be broken; that death comes on innocent and guilty alike; that the loving Father who allows us to suffer in order that we may learn, is set upon our perfection; that in the long run it is best for mankind that causes should produce their natural effects. But it is not the permanence of the law, but the violation of it, which evokes belief. Much is written and spoken on all such occasions over which our Lord would say again, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The use and beauty, the beneficence and the discipline of law are no proof to you of the far-sighted love of God; but when His laws appear to be interrupted in your behalf, then is awakened the cry, "Doubtless Thou art our Father."

But exceptional disasters are not the only occasions which break down men's faith in God; there is much in the regular features of human life which produces the same revolt. Perhaps the most notable one is the suffering of children for the sins of their parents, which may be taken as representing all such objections, as far as men are concerned. The cruelty of brutes to one another is part of the same subject, but not directly affecting man's relation to God. Whether

or not it is wise and right that children should suffer for the sins of their parents, it is surely inconceivable that they should not. We cannot imagine, that is, a state of things in which it should make no difference to a child what manner of man his father was. And even if the physical difficulty were overcome, there would remain the objection that the transmission of good qualities of mind and body would vanish when the entail of evil was cut off; and who would consent to the compromise? And again, supposing the descent of evil could be prevented, and the succession of health and virtue, of intellect and position, could be retained, would mankind on the whole be the gainer? If it could be arranged that the whole results of a man's faults or follies could be confined to himself, would not one of the most powerful of all known securities for prudence and good conduct be removed? Would not the world be on the whole worse instead of better if men were liberated from this restraint? The certainty of the inheritance of evil to his children is the one motive which binds many a man whom no other tie could hold; the removal of it would be the breaking of one of the strongest bonds of society. But how seldom does the certain operation of this law evoke any gratitude for the wisdom and the love of God! how often do instances of its occasional hardship provoke complaint! And yet it is only its unfailing certainty which gives it its value as a discipline. The contemplation of the seemingly mechanical action of these and similar laws may

perhaps make men long for the sign of a Living Ruler ; but however natural this feeling may be, the truer and higher state of feeling is to see in them proofs of a Living Ruler—of His foresight, and of His power of adapting our surroundings to our nature. “ To trust in God in spite of the remorseless march of law,” it has been said, “ this is faith.” It would be more true to say that to trust in Him in consequence of it, is faith. Not only to believe without “ signs and wonders,” but in consequence of their absence, seems the highest trust of all ; the faith our Saviour seems to be longing to see when He utters the complaint in the text.

And to those whose faith stands in need of these proofs of signs and wonders, religion offers the same difficulties that nature does.

It could hardly be expected that there would be any difference of plan between them, considering their common source. And it is found, as a matter of fact, that religion presents the same phenomenon of a Living Will, unchanging and persistent, working towards a definite end, viz. the perfection of man. It is only another side of the education of nature. We find it, or rather God through it, using means to produce ends ; adapting them to the variety of objects to be attained ; and always producing His results according to law.

Even the great interposition of Providence for the salvation of men was an illustration of the universal law of sacrifice, and of another law as wide—that all

the good and evil that comes to men comes from their fellow-men ; that as by man comes death to man, so by man comes also to him the resurrection of the dead. And the means employed were in nicest adaptation to the end sought. Those who look deepest into the nature of man, and into the scheme of man's redemption, will see in them a refined application of means to ends ; a harmony with the system of nature ; and a conformity to its laws, which will more than compensate them for the want of interpositions, or of signs and wonders to assure their wavering hearts that there is a Living God. In the spiritual as in the physical world progress is according to law ; means are required to produce ends ; effects demand causes ; and we rule our conduct and manage the world upon this hypothesis. But in spite of all proofs that growth in godliness is slow ; that each step rests on the one before it ; that a character no more than a city can be built in a day ; there are men who all their lives look for a sudden conversion, and for the sign of it ; or profess to have been converted, and can tell you the sign ; or have a proof that they are saved ; or yearn for a proof of the love of God for their individual souls. They can draw no inference of God's love from nature ; they cannot see that God is speaking and acting in and through it towards the same end that all their spiritual discipline is pointing to ; as if a child could see no proof of his father's love in sleepless care and self-sacrifice, and only knew it by occasional indulgence. Like the Jews of our Lord's

time, except they see signs and wonders they cannot believe.

It is strange that men from such opposite poles of thought as those of the superstitious and the sceptic should have drawn a similar conclusion from the uniformity of law.

The one demands some proof that God hears and loves him, other than nature and religion afford; the other infers the absence of a Designer from the perfection and regularity of His work. Neither of these seem to be the mind that Christ desired to form in us. He taught us that in the midst of law there was one sphere of freedom—in the communication of the spirit of man with the Spirit of God. We are to use this “Freedom within the bounds of Law;” not to pray that the laws of nature may be broken for our comfort or safety, but that we may be conformed to them, and may use them as a discipline for attaining a fuller knowledge of His mind who is the Lawgiver also of the kingdom of grace. We are to pray not that means and processes may be dispensed with in our behalf, or that we may be converted and saved by a miracle, but that we may believe in and make use of the means and aids to perfection with which alike in the natural and supernatural world He surrounds and teaches us. The mind of God, as revealed to us in both these spheres of His action, is one of persistent purpose and patient employment of secondary causes to attain a definite end. Our work on earth is to grow ourselves, and to mould others to the likeness of

this mind. The means to this end are equally clear : to use the freedom we have of communion with Him, that we may be taught to imitate His processes and trust to the education and efficacy of His laws ; to learn by the experience of results the wisdom and love which has ordained them. It is only this experience of the mind and character of God which will give us a faith which can resist all shocks and disappointments and lead us up through knowledge to that love of Him which is Eternal Life.

OVERCOMING DEATH.

ST. JOHN viii. 51.—“ *Verily I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.*”

THE world, we are told, is apt to take a man at his own valuation, and to concede the claims he makes for himself. But it is very quick also to discern their hollowness if they are not supported by his life, and to expose, deride, and reject the pretender when he is found out.

No teacher ever put forth such personal pretensions as Jesus Christ; and yet they are not stated as reasons for rejecting Him by those who have deserted or opposed the religion which He taught. Just before He utters the sweeping promise of the text, He throws down what was a very daring challenge to acute and malignant opponents, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” involving a claim which would have seemed so arrogant and ignorant in the mouth of any ordinary human teacher, that it would have alienated rather than attracted followers; from which a cultivated society, like that which in these days professes to accept the Speaker as its ideal, would have turned with some distaste, as from words which in them-

selves condemned Him, who knew so little of Himself, as unfit to be a Teacher of others. But borne out by the evidence of a spotless life, they attract rather than repel us, and we accept them as the natural expression of conscious sinlessness ; not uttered as a boast, and not extorted by persecution. Men even rejoice in this claim—which is allowed by not being refuted—as a testimony of His power to deliver them from sin because He was free from sin Himself. His pretensions rise still higher in the words of the text: “If a man will keep My saying, he shall never see death.” The former claim was one of passive excellence, but this is one of active power. No pretension can go beyond this ; it is not the only high claim to be found in the Gospels, but in its height and breadth it represents them all.

It is not easy to divest ourselves so completely of the associations of a lifetime as to conceive the feelings with which His contemporaries must have heard the “carpenter” make this stupendous claim. For death had been to the old world in one sense more terrible than it is to the new. Then the future was dark and uncertain to all alike ; if there was less fear in the impenitent, there was less hope in the good. To most men it seemed the end of all things ; of life, energy, and enjoyment ; and its dark shadow fell all along the path from the cradle to the grave. And here was an obscure teacher whose words, He said, would transfigure life by delivering it from this universal dread ; who would do for His followers

what had not been done for Abraham and the prophets. They might well say, "Whom makest Thou Thyself?"

And the contrast between the greatness of the evil and the seeming powerlessness of the remedy has not ceased to affect us, though we profess to accept His words and to believe in His power. Death still remains the great event of life. Regarded from a simply human viewpoint, it is not the chief of life's ills, nor wholly an evil in itself. For it stands to life in the same relation that a fixed unalterable engagement does to the business of each day. It gives definiteness and regularity to it all. It determines all life. It regulates the preparation for maturity as for a time which is limited, and must condense into a few years all the results of preparation. It gives force and intensity to the energies of manhood by reminding us how short is the time for carrying out all ideas and realizing all hopes. It gives a dignity to old age, of which uselessness and helplessness might in some cases rob it, if it were not invested with the mystery of the unknown future which seems so near.

For there is a dignity about death which saves the meanest life from insignificance. And this is true not only of the actual presence of death, which awes all but the thoughtless and the hardened, but it is true as an idea which must always accompany our estimate of living men. The thought that to the most feeble and obscure must come a time when there is no future; when the only look is backward; when they must sum all results, and confess

that there is nothing more for them; a time when they must go on the lonely journey, and learn the great secret, and be on a level at last with the greatest and wisest of the earth;—the thought that the tramp and the convict and the drudge bear about in their bosoms the mystery and the burden of ours, gives them an importance which no worldly distinctions can obliterate; an interest which no degradation can quench; and clothes them with a dignity of which they may be unconscious, but which impresses all who think about anything but the objects of sense by which they are surrounded.

But it is in truth impossible to regard death in this merely positive light as the natural termination of animal life, which may or may not have a future; though there are cultivated men now who refuse on principle to think of it otherwise. The instincts of mankind, varied and uncertain as they have always been about the character of the life to come, are far from doubtful about the fact. This conviction has added the new element of anxiety to the idea of death; has clustered about it a new set of feelings; has derived from it a new set of motives, which are wanting to it when merely viewed as the natural limit of active life: while to Christians the clearness with which Revelation assumes the fact of a *post-mortem* existence, though it does not diminish the importance of death as the inevitable end of all we can do on and for this planet, yet seems to dwarf it by the comparison of a life to whose possible duration and energies we can conceive no bounds.

It cannot be denied that Revelation has added to its terrors also, though this is not its natural effect, nor, as far as we can see, its Divine intention. There were no such lurid pictures conceived of the state of the majority of mankind in the old world, as certain schools of Christian theology have painted to terrify and alienate the new. They are descriptions which, if we would soberly try to realize them about ourselves or those we love, would drive us into madness or revolt. But apart from conceptions inconsistent with a belief in God as our Father, there is enough that is impressive, if not appalling, to the imagination in the idea of the irrevocable past; of the great change; of the solitude of death; of the new experience; of the possibility of more conscious relations with a Divine Person; of a life possibly quite out of harmony with all former dispositions and habits; of the transformed personality of those we have known; of the chance of characters being read there as faces are here;—there is enough in all these possibilities to give meaning to the prayer, “In the hour of death . . . Good Lord, deliver us,” and to make us turn for refuge to the promise, “If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.”

All these are in prospect at that hour; but present at every conscious death are the pathos of the situation; the sadness of saying good-bye to cherished scenes and old habits, and useful work and uncompleted plans; of parting with friends, and with those

who are closer still. There is the sense of failure in life, and the fruitless longing to live it over again; of being cut off in the midst of our days—a feeling which is hardly ever absent from those whose lives are full of energy, however late the last day is. All these circumstances of death no less than its forebodings would make any one who should deliver us from it appear a Saviour indeed. It would be foolish to deny that all these prospects and accompaniments are evils, and that they are very keenly felt—more keenly felt now, perhaps, than at any former time. There are conditions of life, and there have been periods of the world's history, when death must have seemed a release; and the pain of its surroundings and the fear of its future have seemed light in comparison with the evils from which it was a deliverance. But now, when so many things combine to make life desirable; when civilization has removed so many hardships; when liberty and justice have made life endurable to all, and opened up a career in the world to so many; when refinement of manners and of living allows of a chastened and continuous enjoyment of almost the whole of life; when love of nature and of art are giving a new charm to existence; when education is giving a widespread sense of enjoyment in the exercise of developed powers of mind; when easy means of communication enable men to multiply and retain their friendships; the evils of death are perhaps more keenly felt than ever, though the words of the Deliverer have been ringing in men's

ears for nearly two thousand years. In spite of religion and of culture, these aspects of pathos and of anxiety are still those under which death continues to present itself to mankind, and few of us have yet found any specific in the words of Christ against them. It is to be found, He says, in keeping His sayings.

The sayings of all true men, of whom He is the Representative, are the expression of their lives; and the life that He exhibited to men through these words was the Divine life, what we call the life eternal, which knows not death. As He showed to the world for the first time the complete union between man and God, estranged before (not only the possibility of absolute harmony between their wills, but a living instance of the possibility of the eternal life being exhibited in and through a human nature and surroundings), so we must believe that He gifted all men with a potency of the same intimate union, and of the same incorporation into the nature of God.

If the life of God had not been the true life for men, the Divine nature could not have expressed itself in the human; but there was no antagonism visible between them. His human nature had the freest play; it was manifested in the tenderest social relations; it was exercised in the manliest energy and endurance; it fed itself by the most abstract contemplation; it braced itself by voluntary trial and daring. It was emphatically a human life. In the varied experiences of three short years it exhausted

most of the possibilities of feeling, many varieties of action and of suffering; and it vindicates its claim to true humanity by standing out as the typical life of man, as no other recorded life has done, ever since its brief history closed. So far was the human life from being hampered by the Divine nature, or absorbed in it, that the human seems to have found freer scope through the medium of the Divine. The manhood of Christ was wider, and more fully representative both of man's and woman's nature, than any other life that history has preserved. It is this revealed harmony between the two natures; this possibility of human life being lived in the strictest and most literal sense in God, that gives such point to His promise about the mode of deliverance from death. For if He could live this life Himself as a man, His words must make known the "secret" and the "method" by which it is to be achieved. And to attain this life in God is to be delivered from the pain and the fear of death, for death has no more dominion over Him. It is easy, no doubt, to admit these as theological truths, but they are no help and no realities to men unless they can see how they shall escape death by pursuing His method for attaining Divine life. Will not all that is sad and all that is awful about death still remain? Will His sayings change all these circumstances? To keep his words, to enter into their meaning, to absorb them, till our lives become their natural expression, will change not the aspects of death, but us who behold them. It

will make us look with "changed eyes" on partings which are only the preludes to reunion; on the loss of pure enjoyments and noble work and loved companionships as an exchange for a perfect future which will minister food to every faculty of heart and mind, to intellect and to imagination, even to the senses of a transformed and purified body; a place to work for every one, where he will neither faint nor grow weary, or dread that his work is all in vain. If, as we must believe, the Divine Life shall entirely animate and penetrate the world to come, there is nothing fantastic in hoping for such a future, when we have seen with our eyes how free and noble were the energies of human nature when in closest union with the Divine in the person of Christ Jesus.

To keep His sayings will make this change in us, because it will make Life and Death to consist of new and different elements. As their inner meaning takes possession of us, it will slowly unfold the truth, that since the highest life for man is to be lived in another—that is, in God—the essential virtues of a man must needs be relative; must consist in his actions and feelings towards others.

It seems only natural that love, which now makes part of the bitterness of death, should enable men, when purified of all self-regard, to face it—for men and women have overcome the fear of death for love of others; that truth, which consists in reflecting by our lives a perfect image of ourselves to God and man, should arm us with confidence in His

truth when we are on our way to Him ; that purity of heart, which is the one condition of seeing what is godlike in the nature either of God or man, should give us an imperishable life in the being of others that death can neither quench nor appal. A new life is begotten within when the chief interest is in characters ; for character cannot die. Life becomes eternal here on earth when it is fed by elements that death has no dominion over. Just in the same way death eternal may be experienced here also, in a self-centred life. Death is something more than laying aside the body ; it may come before it is laid aside, and coexist with the plenitude of powers, activities, and enjoyments ; and may only then be discovered to be death, and not life, whose caricature it has been so long, when the time comes for all things to slip out of our grasp which seemed to make up life, along with the body which was their instrument. Eternal Life and Eternal Death must be the same here and hereafter ; the same in kind, however different in degree : the one finds its joy in the highest joys of others, and may be capable of vast expansion in a spiritual world. The essence of the other being that it is self-centred, it may be felt with more bitterness hereafter, where the very soul of life must be communion, than here where all its longings can be fed by indulgence.

Life is the promise of the New Testament, and Death, not Punishment (a death, that is, that is its own punishment), is its invariable opposite. The Life

is to be sought and won for its own sake, not for any rewards that it may bring; because the highest Life is its consequence, not its reward. Death is to be shunned not for fear of any other punishment than the worst doom of all, to have quenched the Divine spark, to have degraded a nature capable of union with God; so far as this life is concerned, to have made the Example and Deliverance vain. If no sense of this Eternal Life within will ever brighten the sad parting and the anxious future, it will turn anxieties from within outwards; it will discern in others the blossoming of the same life we feel; it will give hope that He whose nature we have in part put on will complete the vesture, and give us the fulness of that Life of which keeping His sayings has given the foretaste.

THE END OF PAIN.

REV. xxi. 4.—“ *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.*”

THE abstract conditions of man, either now or hereafter, are not thought to come within the ordinary calculations of prudence. Men are ready enough to study or to guess at their own lot in life, or the lot of their children ; by which is meant, for the most part, the place they will occupy in society, the friends they will make, the work they will do, or the money they will have to spend. But these are not the properties of the race, but the accidents of individuals ; they are interesting, not in themselves, but in the way in which they affect us. And yet it might be thought that such questions as that suggested by the text about the contrast between the present and the future of humanity might have an interest for many minds. It does not appeal for its interest solely to the religious sentiment ; if it did, its interest might well be expected to be more limited. But it appeals to all who are of a speculative turn of mind ; to all who feel that the fate of their fellow-men is the most absorbing of all questions ; to all to whom any great problem of life has the attraction of an unexplored country.

Perhaps the first thought about a future life, of which the differentia was the absence of pain and sorrow, and not the presence of some peculiar sources of joy, would be that it was a very meagre conception of Heaven. This would occur to those who, while their lives had been free from suffering, had known little of the higher joys of which human nature is capable. But whether the description is adequate or not, it is very natural; for most men have a very imperfect capacity for joy; they are much less capable of feeling happiness than misery, and they find it much harder to sympathize with joy than with sorrow. And on the other hand so many have experience either of pain within or of trouble about them, that it is not unnatural that their idea of heaven should be a state of freedom from all the burdens of life on earth. So that a notion of heaven has grown up in some minds as of a world like this, without its drawbacks. For we speak of the *world* to come; and wherever we live will be our world. But this is to be a world in which we shall live in no resisting medium; in no atmosphere of friction; a world in which there will be no anxieties, disappointments, or pain. In all else a world of men and women, of work and pleasure, of energy and rest. However easy or hard this may be to conceive, however it may agree with or differ from the general descriptions of Scripture, it is like the promise of the text in its main feature of the absence of all that is painful from the condition of the future. And this immunity from suffering con-

stitutes the difficulty of the conception. It may be none the less true, though we cannot conceive it. We cannot comprehend God, but we believe that He exists; and we may find out that what seemed an inconceivable dream is a realized condition of existence.

But the whole experience of life is against us when we try to imagine a state of the highest joy, and of the noblest conditions of life without a throb of pain or an emotion of sorrow. The records of the highest of all lives are of One who, besides bearing the burden of the sin of the world, "had not where to lay His head;" and ever since, the foremost men of the world have bent the knee before the "Man of Sorrows," and have looked up to a Leader "made perfect through suffering." It may be said that this was the condition of His human life, but is not true of His life in heaven. But if He is with us to the end of the world, the cries of humanity must reach Him still; He must be daily crucified afresh by its sins. If sympathy is of the essence of the highest nature, the Eternal Life of the Son of God must be receptive still of the same emotion by which it was brought to perfection here. And with all we know about ourselves is it possible to conceive of happiness unbroken and unalloyed in store for us for ever?

Few people are so constituted that they could endure it—their natures would infallibly deteriorate—even if it were a life in which they could find pleasure. And this suggests again what a different feeling joy

may be from our conception of it. Many of the elements of it,—like excitement, self-complacency, the sense of security and of superiority, not to speak of physical sensations—must, of course, be absent, and we are thrown back on the joy we can find in others, the source, no doubt, of our highest happiness here. Setting aside the ineffable delight of more close and conscious relations with perfect natures, the joy of a future life must depend on the happiness we are capable of deriving from watching, sharing, and forwarding the happiness of other people. In the last analysis, then, of the possible sources of future happiness, we come to one which seems inseparably associated with sorrow; even the blissful existence of the Son of God seems as if it must be shadowed with the sombre cloud of human anxiety and sin. And we cannot imagine any deep interest in others without its companion shadows of anxiety and pain. All we know of those we love best reminds us how inseparable is the companionship between anxiety and love; all we know of ourselves warns us how much we should lose in character and aim, without the discipline of doubt and fear and hope being added to our faith and charity.

There is, perhaps, no feeling of incompleteness in a life exceptionally free from trouble, but the want is often visible to outsiders. A whole side of the nature seems undeveloped, and in a heart full of pity no sympathy is to be found. This is the best fruit that comes to those who “sow in tears;” but there are other pre-

cious products too. To stand face to face with a great grief is to feel, for the first time, our true relation to the universe and our fellow-men. "I am as other men, subject to the same blows, and pangs, and ills, and marching towards the same death." It dispels many illusions, and puts in the right point of view many of our surroundings which were coloured or refracted by the glare of prosperity. We see things in a "white light" then; and find that conscience within, and God above, and man about us, are the only true realities. The path of duty, so dull before, is the only way of peace and comfort now; the charity and consideration, which seemed a gracious condescension before, are now the fitting attitude for one so stricken to poor fellow-mortals who may so soon feel the stroke themselves. From this experience come the higher results of chastened will and affections; of a new power of sympathy; of a persistent emotion of charity instead of the irregular impulse of pity. And every day's experience brings some of the smaller trials and pains of life, out of which we may rise to more strength and tenderness, from "ashes of our former selves." Many of our trials seem so purposeless that, unless they have such an end as this in view, they are out of harmony with the order of the universe—blemishes and interruptions to it. But, viewed in the light of agencies of an unseen order working out a restoration or reconstruction in man for the purpose of bringing him into harmony with that order, they fall into their right place; they have a meaning and a purpose, and are essential parts of a great plan.

But experience of those who have had no troubles, or of those on whom they have not produced the proper effect, leaves untouched the difficulty of imagining a state where sorrow is unknown, and where we shall have none of the chances and means it offers for rising and growing in moral and spiritual life. The retrospect of our inner life must convince us that joy, according to our notions of it, if unbroken, would be hard to bear; would rob us of much experience; would shut out much knowledge; would withdraw many opportunities of improvement in feeling and character. Regarded from a distance, with the experience of years and the perception of their effects, some of the sorrows of life appear as the best features in it, and we find it hard to imagine what is to take their place.

It would seem as if the joy of the life to come must have a good deal of the element of pathos in it, if it is to be a progressive life; if men are to continue to grow in worth and tenderness; if to some souls, at all events, it is not to be less rich in opportunities of improvement than the present.

Nor would the loss of happiness be less than the loss of spiritual advancement. For no doubt the deepest joys have their pathetic side; all the tenderest recollections of the past are associated with sorrow; all our fondest hopes for the future are toned with anxiety. There *may* be a hope without fear, and a memory without regret; but we are so constituted that it is hard to conceive them; and it is impossible to resist the conclusion that we must be very dif-

ferent sort of people from what most of us are, not merely to be able to enjoy, but to be able to endure such an experience. The calls on compassion; the claims on sympathy; the pathos of so many situations in life; the sadness produced by so many aspects of nature, perhaps by all its grander features; these are some of the elements of the training of an immortal spirit that seem to have done less than half their work in the best of men; to have little chance of completing it before the threescore years and ten. If all the trials of life and the misfortunes of friends and the pathos of nature have failed to draw forth a sigh or a tear; if they have come and gone and left no mark higher up on the scale that registers inner growth; what have we to look forward to, in the promise to "wipe away all tears," if we have no tears to wipe away?

So many of the sorrows of life arise from the failures and imperfections of others, that it may well be thought that in a perfect state we shall be free from them; and that we shall find the same discipline from the tax on our sympathies with their joy, that we now derive from sympathizing with sorrow. We know by experience that this is the higher effort of love. But one of the greatest evils of life—pain—is often in no way derived from or related to others, and is entirely individual; it springs from, and ends in the sufferer. It is often traceable to no cause, and leads to no physical end. For though it is true in some cases that pain is a valuable warning of disorder, and

a hint to take precautions in time, it is equally true that some of the most fatal diseases are painless; and, on the other hand, that some of the acutest pains are not symptoms of danger at all. So that those who believe that the Lord of the universe is the Lord of their spirits too, are driven to seek for some purpose in such a widespread and unaccountable feature in human experience. If it can be traced to no cause of our own creating, and if no physical benefit can be found resulting from it, it is natural to such minds to seek for some correspondence between it and the unseen order of things with which they find themselves united by so many ties. The twin facts of an unseen order of things and of physical pain are among the most intimate and personal facts of consciousness; there is nothing fantastic in assuming a correspondence between them.

If it is the purpose of God, as representing this unseen order, to work a change in us, to effect a renovation of our nature; and if we find ourselves suffering without cause and without result—other than this change or renovation—it is natural to believe that He is using this agency to promote this end. Connecting our experience with this end, we can read it anew. If we could see in pain a use and necessity to our own nature, and to others through its improvement—if we could see it as existing for, and essential to this end—our view of the mode of God's working in the world would be modified, and the whole aspect of our painful experience would be changed. Just as physical

science has shown us in the material world forces unseen and unsuspected by us working out regular and necessary results, so the hidden forces of personal experience may, through the gradual elevation of individuals by the discipline of pain, be working out the redemption of the world, and the perfection of man's being. Even the first rudiment of perfection—the sense of the goodness of God for the blessing of animal life—can hardly come without a sense of the interruption of its enjoyment. Certainly the liveliest gratitude for the Divine benevolence is found in habitual sufferers. For some reason it has a spiritualizing effect of its own; perhaps because no merely personal feelings have any chance of being mixed up with it. There can be no sense of wounded pride or self-love in it; no remorse in it; no self-reproach, no revolt against ingratitude, no envy, and no upbraiding; the sufferer is not to blame, and no one has brought it on him; there is nothing to fall back upon, no one to whom to impute his misery, no energy of action to blunt his grief. It is *there*; and it must be borne, till it stops and peace comes; and there is no moment of life when the sense of peace is so deep as when a great pain goes away. The feeling is another link of likeness between pain and the unseen world; for the cessation of it leaves nothing to desire, and makes it easier to conceive the reality of perfect happiness being indeed what it is said to be, “the peace of God.”

It adds another mystery to the thought of the life

to come to remember the promise that there shall be "no more pain." This intimate, personal, deep-seated teacher under whose discipline those who know, tell us that the fairest flowers of human hope and love, gratitude and resignation, have grown up; how are we to attain to perfection without it? Will God give us a softer discipline to take its place? What manner of men must we be when the time comes to enter into the painless state, unless the experience of life has been so used by us as to have provided some substitute for its hallowing influence?

MYSTERIES OF EARTH AND HEAVEN.

ST. LUKE viii. 10.—“ *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*”

MEN are more conscious now perhaps than they have ever been before that they are surrounded with mysteries, and more hopeless of being able to solve them. There are still men, and perhaps there will always be men, who, for part of their lives at all events, will refuse to accept the experience of others, or believe that certain problems are insoluble until they have run their own heads against the dark wall which bounds all knowledge, and have heard for themselves, “Thus far shalt thou go,” in answer to one more attempt to speculate and to penetrate.

In despair of all possibility of demonstration, some shape their lives on an hypothesis of necessary ignorance and, as far as they can, abstain even from all conjecture about the most interesting questions that can occupy the mind of man. But they will not be expelled by a theory—they return, to puzzle and to baffle; as outraged Nature will revenge herself, stifled inquiry will crop up in more eager curiosity still.

It will perhaps seek a vent in some new direction,

and try to get, by a side way, behind the curtain it cannot lift, like the attempt of the spiritualist to learn the secrets of the invisible world.

In some way it will find vent, till it wears itself out ; and men settle down to one of two convictions : either that it is not worth the while of a reasonable being to concern himself with an order of things which cannot be proved to exist ; or, that enough is revealed for life and conduct ; enough to show what is the order of the universe, and that for the rest they must be content to wait. On these mysteries the great revelation of the Son of God throws no light. He left us with a hint that He might have told more, but there is no suggestion in any word of His that any of the “many things” would have made any of the dark spots brighter than they are now. This is not the kind of light He gave. Perhaps these are not mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven at all. Certainly they are not among those that unfold themselves to an eager desire to know, or even to the pure heart that can see God Himself. For clear heads and pure hearts have chafed all their lives against ignorance, and have gone down to the grave cheered by the prospect of “more light.”

Men to whom our Lord would have granted every privilege of the Kingdom of Heaven have left the earth as much in the dark about the great problems of existence as the most gross and careless of their race. We must accept the indication as final on the subject, though there are men, especially young men,

who will never cease to speculate : perhaps it would be a sign of something wanting in them if they did. Our Lord cannot, then, be speaking of such problems when He promises a solution of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to some of His followers.

Most people would prefer the answer to their own questions to the spiritual discernment which He explains as the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven ; they would regard the key to their favourite puzzles as the greater boon ; but He taught us the relative values of a good many things, and it is likely that the knowledge He promises is the more important, if not the most interesting. In other spheres besides the spiritual one, the most essential knowledge is not always the most welcome.

But, at all events, He does promise special insight to some, while the other knowledge is impartially withheld from all. It must to a spiritual being be vital as well as interesting knowledge, and yet it is not common to mankind. Men have at all times been ready to seize on such words ; to build theories of selection on them ; to construct religious systems on them ; learning neither from the whole drift of Scripture nor from the experience of life. But Scripture and Life are the very teachers which would give the wisdom to all which Christ promises to the few.

A little thought about His words might possibly show that the few might be all ; that the "selection" was "natural," not arbitrary ; that the "survival" was of the "fittest," not of the favoured ; and again, that the

fitness depended on qualities which all alike possess; that the knowledge came from the use of them. The privilege in this case was granted to those who came to inquire. The desire to know was the only qualification for initiation into those mysteries. "The disciples and those about Him," St. Mark says, came for the explanation; that is, all who had shown an interest in His life and works, and who had been able to see under the cloke of His commonplace position and circumstances the tokens of a Divine nature. Most of them had had fewer advantages than many of their countrymen for discerning the hidden significance of common objects; but by the affinity of spiritual natures they had read the great secret of all time—the revelation of the Divine Spirit in the forms of matter. It belongs to the idea of the word "mystery," as it is used in Scripture, that men should be able to understand it, if they care to find it out. A mystery is not a secret; it is a revealed secret. So the revelation of the nature of God in Jesus of Nazareth is a mystery alike to those who can and to those who cannot see the essence of the Divine nature in that humble Life.

Here the parable of the Sower is spoken of as a mystery, though probably many of us who are familiar with Christ's style might have guessed its meaning.

The Pharisees, we know, caught the drift of some of His parables, and "perceived that they were spoken against them," not from spiritual affinity, but because their wits were sharpened by self-regard. The loftiest

and the lowliest of mysteries are brought together—the Incarnation and the parable of the Sower. Between them lie all the mysteries of life and nature by which we are surrounded. It is suggestive to hear a comparison of the germination of seed to the spread of the Word of God, called a mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven. It might have seemed more natural to look into the library of the Fathers; into discussions on the relations of the Persons of the Trinity, or into such a book as the “Paradise Lost” for heavenly mysteries, without such a guide as this into what is truly heavenly. But if this is a parable of things Divine, then all life is full of such parables, for the life of plants is the lowest form of life; and if this has its Divine significances, much more must the life of animals and of man be crowded with teaching for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. The Saviour’s question, “Do ye not understand this parable?” sinks into a complaint—“How then will ye understand all parables?” as He thinks how little men see of all that is about them. He complains of being misunderstood, or not understood at all.

Like a great artist observing the indifference of the crowd to his picture, or listening to their ignorant remarks; or a great writer reading reviews of his book which show his whole meaning to have been missed; the great Artist of the universe looks on at us for whom He has made all this, and wonders that we can only see surface, and natural laws, and

cause and effect, and evolution and development, when He has made each one of these features of His creation eloquent of the Mind that made it; a revelation of the laws which guide and the love which sustains an unseen world in which He and "we live and move and have our being." The crowning instance of this union of matter and spirit is in His own Life, in which it is impossible to discriminate the human from the Divine, or to classify the motives, so complete is their affinity. And He, as representing this union in His own person, fitly calls attention to its universality.

Things are so made, He seems to say, that only perverseness can fail to see that all created things not only owe their natural life to the one Great Spirit, but are the body and permanent revelation of Himself to the senses, and through the senses to the soul of man.

And it is because the life that is in them comes from God that they are able to address what is Divine in us. "The starry night" that filled the philosopher with wonder, and the poet's "meanest flower," with its "thoughts too deep for tears," alike testify by their influence on the spirit of man to the existence of something besides matter in the visible universe; and not only to its existence, but to its power to teach. To ignore the informing spirit in matter, which is the way of most; or to deny it, a conclusion to which study has led a few—this is to make its teaching impossible. But it is common to go beyond this failure

to recognize the symbolism of nature and life. Even religious people designedly separate the two worlds, into earthly and heavenly ; into this world and the next ; as if next meant that which comes after, and not that which is nighest or nearest to this—into things human and things divine. This is to exclude all the experience of life from the sphere of spiritual teaching. And what is there left then ? Only the hours that are spent in the house of God or in private devotion. What fraction of a life are they to counteract the influence of surroundings confessedly out of sympathy with all that is highest within us ; with all, as we believe, that can survive what we see about us ! The balance of a life so conceived and so led must be immeasurably on the side of the obvious motives to action. The scale of spiritual influences must inevitably kick the beam. The points of contact with them are few and far between ; their effect, when they are in contact, is not always to correct, it is sometimes to confirm the tendencies produced by the other side of life. For a religion which consists in religious services is apt to degenerate into a more subtle form of selfishness, which has been aptly called “other worldliness ;” a sort of insurance against risk after death, instead of being the service and the consecration of all life to perfecting the Divine Image in ourselves ; to making some, however few, more what men and women were meant to be. And it is easy to guess what contact with a world in which no Divine life is believed to dwell ; with men who are never

regarded as temples of an indwelling Christ—it is easy to guess what effect such an association must produce. According to a man's conception of the world will be its effect upon him.

It is obvious to answer that this is the practical view of life and religion, and to sneer at the other as the imaginative one. The question is this very one which *is* the most practical. As long as any religion is professed at all, the view that gives us the truest conceptions of our spiritual condition must be the most practical. Christians will be slow to deny that Christ's was a practical view of life, and yet He took the poetic rather than the literal view of men and nature. He saw in little children, heirs of heaven; in an old cripple, a spiritual daughter of Abraham; in sparrows, objects of His Father's care; in the lilies, a fairness surpassing the glory of Solomon. Of all men He discerned most clearly the spirit underlying matter, and saw "the soul of goodness in things evil;" claimed this world as His own, and by drawing lessons from the lowest form of life, vindicated the sanctity of it all, and declared its sufficiency to enlighten and to exercise in a true religion the spirit and the affections of men.

But even without consciously ignoring this character of life and nature, it is easy to miss their significance. This spiritual discernment needs cultivation, and the obscurer hints of Nature are mute and invisible to those who have learnt nothing from her broader parables. Men cannot understand the mysteries of

the kingdom of God, unless they believe that they are living in it. Early associations may sometimes account for this. We are taught to call ourselves children of God, and are not always brought up as if we were living in His kingdom, but in at least a foreign, if not in an enemy's country. And this is as true of those who enjoy the pleasures of the world without compunction, as of those who dread and denounce them. By neither is the lesson taught of a world redeemed by God, and united to Him by the Incarnation—a world which speaks of the moral qualities of His nature in every leaf and flower, no less than in the spirit of man, and in the stars in their courses. This world will not, of course, be fruitful in its lessons of God to those who hate its pleasures and fear its influence, and think the aim of life is to get through it with the least possible prejudice to contingent interests hereafter. But eyes may be blinded and ears stopped in other ways than by a foregone conclusion.

The more familiar experience is to love the world not wisely but too well. Every one knows what it is that makes him blind and deaf to the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven ; what makes him fail to see the significance that lies hidden in the most familiar forms. The hurry of life is too severe ; the pursuit of pleasure gives no time for quiet, and destroys the taste for it ; social ambition makes simpler pleasures pall on the taste ; literature that demands no thought destroys the habit of thinking ; sympathies never

cultivated by association with sorrow and distress die of starvation. The mind has no time for rest ; is never forced back upon itself, and compelled to review its position. It is entangled with its preoccupations ; the thorns have sprung up and choked it ; it fails to see the realities of life because of its eager clutch of the shadows. And yet this power of seeing the hidden meanings of things, of interpreting the parables of nature and of life, is one which all would have, if it were to be had easily ; it would add infinitely to the pleasures of the country ; it would combine gracefully with the enjoyment of society. It would, of course, do far more ; for it is the gift of the poet, the artist, and the philosopher, and it is the confirmation of the hope of the Christian. But the special blessing of being able to read the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven is this, that it sanctifies all life ; it does not make equivocal enjoyments pure ; or turn excess into moderation ; but by bringing men face to face with the realities of being it makes them real ; by revealing the Divine under the forms of the natural, it teaches them to extract the good and reject the evil in the persons, scenes, and occupations of their lives.

If in family life, for instance, we saw the type of an eternal union, it would not be without its effect on the relations of husbands and wives, of parents and children. More regard might be had to impressions produced and influences exercised on children if this strangely close communion were thought of as a mystery revealing an endless association. Friend-

ship, casual co-operation, social acquaintance, all human relations would be big with the same significance. The solemn procession of nature's operations would speak to us of the trustworthiness of the Creator; its beneficent action in the support of animal life; the love of brutes for their offspring; of the mother for her child; would convince us of the Father's love with an assurance no dogma could rival and no doubt could shake. The beauties of earth and sky and sea would tell us of a mind rich in sympathy with all the purest human tastes, and give a promise of a future in which they would find appropriate objects.

The whole system by which men and brutes and plants are sustained would tell us of that law of self-sacrifice which is the expression of God's nature; to which we must conform and subordinate intellect, will, and affections as the first condition of being able, under the shadows of the visible world, to see the kingdom of God.

THE THREEFOLD REVELATION.

ACTS xvii. 28.—*“For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”*

ST. PAUL displays his natural tact and largeness of heart when he supports this assertion by a quotation from a Greek poet. Addressing Athenians, he calls Aratus one of their own poets, though he lived in Paul's city Tarsus, because Aratus was a Greek. He claimed that the God both of Jews and Greeks was the same God, by whatever name He was called. He wanted to show them that they “lived, and moved, and had their being” in the shadowy impersonality whom they addressed as an “unknown God.” It was not the name or the want of a name that made the truth of worship; but the clean hands and the pure heart, and the character of the Being to whom heart and hands were raised. A certain one of our “own poets,” too, tells us that it is this which makes the true God; not the name, be it “Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.”

We are some way from St. Paul's sympathy with those who pay a genuine homage to an abstraction or, as we say, an impersonal God. We are more careful to get an idea of God into our heads than to be sure that it is the right idea. We are impatient of

uncertainty about Him, and less studious to avoid wholly inadequate conceptions. But the moral impression made by the fact of God is quite out of proportion to this zeal for an accurate idea. Men are stirred to indignation when physical science declares a creation impossible and a Creator unnecessary ; but the assertion of the existence of such a Being as God must be, if He exists at all, does not produce the effect that might be expected, not to say on their lives, but on their feelings. The source and the foundation of all religion has perhaps a disproportionately small share in religious thought. It is easy to be so much occupied with the details of a creed ; with inferences from Revelation ; even with our own worship, as to be less conscious of the idea that ought to possess a man if he has any religion at all. And yet this is the ground which all religions, worthy of the name, occupy in common. In Him men of all the great religions acknowledge that they “live, and move, and have their being,” however much they may misconceive or misrepresent Him. All alike have His great revelations of Himself, in nature, history, and the soul, whether they read our Sacred Books or repeat our Creeds.

The fact that the course of nature is on the whole favourable to those who conform to its laws, is the most obvious and natural way of revealing the existence of a righteous ruler. Physical well-being is attained both without and within our own persons by this conformity ; but we may ascend higher than

this, and discern an employment of the laws and forces of nature for moral ends; an education of man conducted by means of physical agencies. The punishments of selfishness, of improvidence, of indulgence, are secured by physical causation. Even when they are inflicted by men on one another, they are still the work of nature. For we are parts of nature, and are used by God to bring about moral as well as physical ends. We can use either moral or physical means to bring about either moral or physical ends, but we are unique in nature in our power of using means to moral ends. Granting the use of means in nature, we establish a higher than merely natural relation to its Author by the conscious adaptation of them to moral ends. This relation is man's singular privilege; but considered as a part among other parts of nature, his relation to God is through its laws. To live in a true relation to Him we must know the laws of nature, and those who are revealing them to us are more and more revealing Him to us as the God of nature.

Some, in the study of origins, may have lost sight of the Originator (perhaps some day to arrive at a higher and wider conception of Him): this is part of the price paid for the great gain in the knowledge of nature which our days have seen. To men in general this new light ought to reveal God in a new relation, and ought to multiply their conscious relations to Him.

One of the ways in which this increased knowledge may elevate our relation to Him, is seen in the effect

which the demonstration of the Reign of Law in the universe has had in spiritualizing prayer. It has had the effect, with the most spiritually minded persons, of limiting the objects of prayer in a great degree to spiritual objects. So far as it has done this, it has approached nearer to the model of all prayers, which contains only one petition for any material object, viz. for daily bread ; nearer, too, to our Lord's teaching on prayer, when He says, " If ye then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ? " Here is an instance of the physical order of things teaching not only a moral but a spiritual lesson.

Not less spiritual is the lesson taught by the energy and care of Divine Providence in all the details of nature. It exhibits an example and a sanctification of honest labour in all the operations of life ; a call to conscientiousness and a rebuke to unprincipled work, which those who run may read as plainly as in the print of their Bibles. Even from those whose studies have led them to deny Him, has come a call to a more intelligent homage to God, for they at least have learnt to reverence nature in which He has expressed Himself to man. Something of the spirit of awe and wonder which they feel for His works might with advantage be more habitual to some of us for the Mind which designed and controls them all.

If there is no one behind the veil, it is a coincidence that history teaches the same lessons of

benevolence wisdom and righteousness, which nature declares to be the attributes of God. As we look back we can see a harmony in its great movements, and a purpose running through all the ages. Empires are seen succeeding to one another; order replacing anarchy; the force of law substituted for the force of will; migrations bringing the best races into the best places; the highest morality the world has ever learnt received by the most powerful and impressive races of men. All down the course of time there has been "a stream of tendency making for righteousness," and men's conception of right has risen and grown with its onward course. There has been, that is, a force within or without men, making them more like God; and capable at the same time of enlarging their view of Him and of their own obligations, so as to engage them for ever in the pursuit of a receding and unattainable perfection. The most spiritual lesson of the New Testament, "Be ye therefore perfect," and the problems in nature to whose solution we can approximate but cannot reach, teach us in the same manner of a mind like but beyond our own, working in nature, history, and the human soul, and vindicating its likeness to us by the fact that its perfection does not cease to be a motive, though it is known to be unattainable.

It is an evidence of the divine element in history that the idea of right should have been the growing one; for righteousness not only involves all virtues, but it is in its barest form the most diffi-

cult and painful to attain and practise. Kind actions are often pleasant; right actions are often painful; to discern that what is right is what is most truly kind; to carry this out at whatever self-sacrifice; this is the temper we assert to have been growing all through history, and it is the character we ascribe to God. It is none the less His work because it is the product of natural forces, or of evolution. It is the characteristic of mind to use physical means to produce moral ends; and all behind us in the life of our race, all around us in the universe, we find these agencies steadily and in the long run tending to impress on man his own highest idea of what is perfect. We can assert that this is an underived attribute of matter, if consciousness will allow us.

There have been, of course, many checks to this stream of tendency; corrupt morality has followed on Stoic virtue; wars, that cannot be justified because good has come out of them, but which yet have shown which way the stream was flowing, and what was the tendency of human affairs. This steadfast purpose of divine evolution, overruling waywardness, employing wilfulness, putting up with weakness; this holiness of character, and pertinacity in well-doing, give us a different idea of what the Spirit of God really is than any mere notions of largeness. We speak of God as omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent; but there is a qualitative as well as a quantitative appreciation of Him; and we dis-

cern in His treatment of nations an intensity of spiritual life; a burning energy; a patience, resolution, and sympathy that never fail to produce singular results when exhibited by men. But the goodness of God does not seem to impress us at all to the same extent that the goodness of men does. "The Great First Cause least understood," is least understood still, in history and conscience as well as in nature. The primary fact of religion is not the substance of it. Such knowledge may be too wonderful and excellent for us; but the effort to attain it is a religion in itself.

Men who have the taste and power for mental abstraction may close their eyes and try by the utmost force of their imagination to realize such a being as God; but the mind is unequal to the task: they arrive either at a "magnified man," or a being without the moral and spiritual qualities which make Him conceivable to us, and which we can discover from His relation to nature and history—qualities which are in the strictest sense the salvation of men by giving them an example, an aim, an ideal, and a hope.

But if we are only mediately related to the Spirit of God in nature and history by the operation of natural and social forces producing moral and spiritual effects in us, we are also directly related to His Spirit as spiritual beings. "We are His offspring" in this highest sense of all. And because man is related to Him as no other part of nature is,

as men in the mass are not; from the time when he first walked upon the earth he has heard within him "the voice of the Lord God in the cool of the day;" in the quiet afterthoughts when passion is still and interest is forgotten. This indwelling presence of the God within completes the cycle of our possession and surrounding. "Whither shall I flee, then, from Thy presence?" If I look out on sky or sea, on plains or mountains, Thou art there; on wars or migrations, on revolutions, or the orderly growth of communities, Thou art there also. If I soar aloft, or descend into the depths of my being; in the heaven of aspiration, or in the hell of remorse and shame, even "there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me."

For within us as well as without there is a power "that makes for righteousness." Its ascendancy is acknowledged not only in the general outcome of a career, when it is easy in review to trace its drift, and put the finger on the causes which have contributed to the result of failure or success; but it makes itself felt in the great crises of life, and on small occasions too, when there is a distinct sense of obstacle to be overcome in the way of human passion or human pride. For the action of this power within harmonizes exactly with the spirit of the New Testament; it opposes all that men naturally tend towards; all that they feel, even in the impetus of an irresistible tendency, to be a derogation from their true nature. It rouses them

always to seek what is above, which they at once hate as difficult and irksome, and own to be sublime. If the authority of this voice were not established by its harmony with the spirit which breathes through the life and words of Him who is the most Divine of all the sons of men, it would be proved by its antagonism to all that is weak and mean, to all that is cruel and false in human tempers and human ways.

And if this power of resistance and of self-judgment is Divine and universal, then all men have, as a common endowment, what is noblest and best in the nature of the highest; a gift compared to which all others are insignificant. In what is most important all men are equal. They are all equal, we say, in the sight of God; they have an equal claim on and share of His love; but they are not all equal in the sight of man, because we only know God generally and not as He is. The first result of learning Him through all His revelations would be this power of regarding men as He does. But the sense of this common relation to Him and to one another, which is the spiritual side of the social precept to "honour all men," and the reason of it; this sense is last arrived at. Men are content to be good haters, if they are good lovers; to be tolerant of humanity at the cost, perhaps, of a mild contempt for it; not to have a single friend out of their own rank in society. If the time the prophet speaks of ever comes on earth, when "all shall know Him, from the least

to the greatest," it will reveal to men, among other things, the way in which God regards them; as the first hint and help towards a true estimate by men of one another. We read in the New Testament, "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God." Our Liturgy tells us that eternal life consists in this knowledge; but we are apt to think that knowing God is the same as knowing that there is a God, which has no necessary connexion with eternal life at all. But if this knowledge is the path of life, men have only to open eyes and ears to gain it; they may learn as they look; and grow in it as they read; and be unknowingly filled with it as they pile year on year. Nature and human history are their teachers, and there is the voice of a Friend more persuasive than a teacher. Whether the result of this silent teaching has been righteousness or not, each knows best; but few would deny that the issues of their actions and habits correspond to all that nature and history had told them of the ways of God to men. Few would deny the growing sense of a power within, not themselves, though very near them, and seeming to them more and more to be of God, because it urged them, whenever choice wavered, to right; and because they found that right brought joy; because in retrospect it is always teaching men, by the harmonies and contrasts of their career with the Divine Life, that with all that sense of being "parts of one stupendous whole" which nature and history are always forcing on them, they have besides an individual relation to

the Author of all, not weakened, but confirmed by participation with others ; and can hear within a voice that harmonizes with the many notes of nature and of man, which utter the same language to their souls.

THE PRIDE OF POWER AND THE JOY OF LOVE.

ST. LUKE x. 20.—“ *In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you ; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*”

SUCH language as this would be set down as figurative in the conversation or literature of to-day. It is thought appropriate in sermons, though it is only so far suitable in them as it reveals and does not hide realities. It seems natural in the Bible, where it is meant to convey truths, but sometimes veils them. No doubt much of the teaching of the Bible, loses its force from forgetfulness that it is the utterance of the Spirit to human spirits ; that its meaning must therefore be above all things spiritual ; that the figure is but the husk which holds the kernel.

Thus regarded, a caution to missionaries elated with the success of their work, and with the effect of their words and presence on the poor victims of disordered mind who were so common in Palestine in the Saviour's days, becomes a philosophic maxim of the higher life ; a counsel of perfection for those who

think about, and work at, both personal and public improvement for all time to come.

Limited to its first and obvious meaning, the warning has the charm of all teaching; it was exactly suited to the hearers; it was quite clear to them; and it was just what they wanted. They had felt their influence over the insane, and they could appreciate the joy of being enrolled on the register of His followers whose kingdom was coming on the earth. And the joy of His love and confidence was worth more than any exercise of power. But the habit of mind of our own days has made what was almost literally true to them, pure allegory to us. We want to know the modern equivalents of such phrases; what they mean when translated into the language we use when we escape for a time from talk about persons, and objects of sense, and the business of the visible world.

We want to know what they represent of the thoughts we stray into when sight and hearing are shut out, and the things that are unseen assert their claims to notice.

Most people, no doubt, think they know pretty well what Christ meant His disciples to understand by this precept; but the effort to transfer the words to a life and circumstances so different as their own is too much, even if it occurred to them that the Bible was intended for such treatment. And those who do philosophize about their being do not always perceive that their abstract terms have their analogies in the concrete figures of the New Testament. If the soul of

Christ's teaching is its fitness for humanity, then it must have its lesson for all; for the philosopher as well as the man of action, for the nineteenth century as well as for the first. And the first thing that must strike the most superficial thinker about these words is the way in which the great Teacher passes, by an easy bound, above all the ordinary causes of pride and self-congratulation. He fastens at once on the highest and (to our thinking) the most legitimate source of joy; the pride of personal influence for the highest objects; and says it is not to be compared with the true ground of joy which it was His mission to reveal to the world.

He has nothing to say to the "fool" that said to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years;" nor to the pride that rejoiced in the front rows at synagogues and the high places at feasts; nor to pride in "the claims of long descent" that "the grand old gardener" is said to "smile at;" nor to the pride of beauty, nor the pride of rank, nor to the pride of wit. These are surface vanities, silly of course, but often not touching deep or tainting the character. People often rejoice in such things without being much the worse for it. But there are deeper-seated sources of self-congratulation which He passes by too, in all His teaching, as if He thought all such feelings were included in this condemnation.

There is a pride which makes a man not rejoice in any of his possessions or acquirements, but in himself; that despises those whose advantages it envies;

that claims exceptional treatment for itself; that thinks its wishes laws, and its ways a standard of right; that is too proud to be vain, and too self-satisfied to change places with any one; that has no other sentiment towards men but a gentle scorn for them. Such feelings as these, not unknown among people we are intimate with, yet not recognized in their naked antagonism to the spirit of the Gospel, are swept out of the range of possibilities for a Christian character by the simple warning against pride in personal influence.

And what is there to rejoice in if this is a forbidden pleasure? It is the only thing worth having in the world, after love; and multitudes of men and women would put it first.

In any form, and exerted by whatever means and for whatever end, it is a pleasure too intoxicating for most heads to stand, and a result for which men are ready to give health, time, money, life, and reputation. There are times when the visible impression made by words thrills a man like electricity; when the applause of a crowd is like music to his ears; when the influence of his character is seen in national movements. The poet who, like Goldsmith, wrote his verses for fame and his prose for bread; the painter who works his hardest at a picture he knows will not sell, and trusts to later ages for his reward; the soldier or sailor who dies happy in the thought of "Westminster Abbey;" the statesman who is content to leave his reputation to history;—all these have felt "the spur

that the clear spirit doth raise ; ” all acknowledge the irresistible attraction of personal influence ; all would say in some form or other what has been put into an epigram in our days, “ Glory is the only thing that is not vanity.”

But when this magic power we call personal influence is not self-regarding ; when the desire is not to win a name or to exert influence by doing good, which is one of the commonest ways now of becoming known and powerful in society ; but, to take the purest case of all, when the aim is simply to impress others for their own sake ; to do them good by the action of mind or character on other minds with no ulterior aim ;—to see the success of such work seems the highest and purest joy that can be granted to men, and not to rejoice in it seems more than human. This is, of course, exactly what the disciples were told not to do ; or, to take the most modified form of the warning, what they were at all events taught was a poor subject of rejoicing compared with that other inward joy which the new Teacher first introduced into the world. He puts forward this joy as the result and the reward of that preference of the inward over the outward, of the unseen to the seen, which was the core of His spiritual philosophy. For the disciples had claimed, as many are claiming now, to subdue the spirit of evil in men about them ;—by their words and presence to infuse a Holy Spirit which should expel the spirits of lust, and lies, and cruelty. They rejoiced in their success ; but many noble men and

women who, unnoticed and unknown, are trying now to expel the evil spirits of pauperism, improvidence, intemperance, and immorality, have no other support than joy and hope in their work. For many see no results, and have no success to rejoice in ; and for them the true meaning of the Saviour's caution is seen. It is transformed into a comfort. There is always this joy, which He describes in figurative language, of having " their names written in heaven," to cheer and to sustain those who are working for others.

It is a promise, probably, which few people correctly realize. But light is thrown upon it by its conjunction and comparison with the highest happiness we can imagine here, viz. joy in the success of unselfish work. It must therefore be a joy at least as unselfish, and a joy capable of being felt at the same time and by the same people, as the other. The wording of the Saviour's promise might suggest a different character of joy, and a distant period for its fruition. It has, perhaps, misled people. The notion of names registered, coupled (as it must necessarily be) with popular conceptions of heaven, might suggest places secured hereafter in a sphere of happiness ; and the hope of these might be thought to be the deeper joy which He contrasts with the joy of successful work for the good of men. But, compared with this joy, surely the hope of any happiness for ourselves is a lower motive ; inconsistent with His teaching who said that " if a man would save his soul he must be ready to lose it " for the great cause ; at variance with our

deepest instincts, and no doubt with our experience. For we see people living all their lives with a complacent assurance of heaven, who (as far as it is fair to judge our neighbours) seem to derive no very keen joy from working for mankind. They take the text very literally, and do "not rejoice because the spirits are subject to them," but do "rejoice because their names are" (as they suppose) "written in heaven."

But perhaps it is only those who are capable of the one joy that can appreciate the other; the Saviour may have added the promise of the better joy because He saw His followers capable of what can hardly be called the lower happiness. The capacity for the one may be the condition and measure of the power of enjoying the other. Perhaps He saw, too, that the workers in the noblest field wanted this assurance and this help, because it is precisely in such work that success is rarest and the fruit of slowest growth. Joy in success is a delusive and uncertain consolation, and pure as it is when it comes, He offers them a surer and a purer sustenance. But not surely the promise of a distant happiness in return for what they have done and suffered here. This would be to leave them without support in their work, and to substitute a lower for a higher joy. It must be a happiness higher in kind, capable of supporting and inspiring them now. To ascend to such a height of spiritual joy is to breathe an atmosphere too rarified for most lungs, for it is to find it not only not in the success, or even in the energy, but in the

motive of work ; to find in the love which prompts the highest work of all its highest joy. And there is nothing men are slower to believe in as a reason for rejoicing, purer and stronger than the most successful work, than the love of God. If it is hard for any man to believe that God loves him, and harder still to find in this conviction much more than a sense of relief and comfort, a kind of assurance against future contingencies, and not a delight which ought to amount to exultation ; how rare it must be in ordinary men and women really to be made happier by the thought of God's love for everybody ! how hard, perhaps, to believe that He does love all !—the false, the foul, the cruel, the thief, the murderer, and the sot ! It is because we find it so hard to love people ourselves that we find it so hard to believe that God loves them. It is because we believe so little in the love of God that we love Him so little. It is because we love both God and our neighbour so little that we find it so hard to believe in His love for our individual selves. It is a chain in which every link must be perfect. As the first link in this chain, the Gospel teaches that if we would love either God or our neighbour we must begin by realizing and maintaining the spiritual bond that unites us to the Father of all ; by perfecting within the powers of love and spiritual perception, which are the moving and the directing forces in our approach to God, and in our intercourse with men. The kingdom of Heaven is within us—if we like, that is ; there is a capacity in each to feel that love for man, for self,

for God; that joy in the love of man, and in God's love for man, which is heaven, and is the source of all the good we can hope to do. Its course and progress must be from within outwards.

Self-love like this is as far from selfishness as the hope of future happiness, which attends but often does not sanctify life here, is from the heaven which consists in the love of God and man. Few men need the caution, or the rebuke, or the comfort, of the text. They are not for the most part in any danger of rejoicing overmuch in the subjection of evil spirits to their influence. The promise of the higher and surer joy is to those who are resting in the lower and more uncertain; the warning and the rebukes are not only to those who rejoice in success, but to those who have neither effort nor success to rejoice in. Most of all is the warning to those who "rejoice because their names are written in heaven," but have not found out what the joy of heaven is while they lived on earth. Man's love for God is hard to gauge; few of us could say that He is the object of any very lively emotion at all. To most He is still "the unknown God;" in part inevitably, in part from want of study of the indications of His love, and of the revelation of His being in the person of Christ.

We know much more of Christ from the closer study of His life of late, by writers orthodox and unorthodox. He has been brought out into reality and humanity as He never was before; but to how many does devotion to this ideal; devotion to mankind for His sake; His

testimony to the eternal love—to how many does this assurance of requited love bring the repose and ecstasy which come of a deep love given and returned among men? If we can find a heaven in a true love for one—as in the true love of man and woman—so that we ask nothing more, and can live with nothing less than so to love and in return be loved; this is surely the voice of the Divine Spirit, hinting to us the true home and the true source of Heaven; that it is independent of Life and Death, of here and hereafter.

If the love of one is all sufficient, and can “make a palace of a cottage,” and heaven anywhere, it seems no exaggeration to say that it hath not “entered into the heart of man to conceive” the heaven of a deep love of our kind; the heaven of finding that true love is returned by the love of God.

As a man’s notion of heaven is, so will his life be. If a heaven to come is compatible with a joyless and unloving life here, it must depend on something else than the knowledge of God and communion with the good. If the great Teacher’s account of heaven be true, we may judge severally what we know of its joys now; what reason we have for rejoicing because our names are on the roll of “this goodly company,” and what pleasure it may bring us in another state of being to depend for all our happiness on emotions and on energies in which we find only a faint and fitful satisfaction here.

TRIALS OF FAITH.

ST. JAMES i. 2.—“ *The trying of your faith worketh patience.*”

It might rather be expected that the trying of faith would produce assurance, and that this was the providential design of it. For patience cannot of necessity be a perfect state; it is in its nature a condition of not having what we want, of looking forward to something that is better, of submission for the time to that which is worse. But yet this imperfect state is all that is reached by trials of faith; not conviction or joy, but only the power to wait. This is all that is achieved by what tests a man's faith in that which is the only means he knows for rising from the lower to the higher—all that he can hope for as the result of what shakes his faith in the only ground he has for hoping and enduring at all. But whatever may be thought of it at first, it must be a result worth having; for the struggles are often sharp, and the occasions of them so numerous, that it is impossible not to believe that they are an intentional part of the education which it is the will of God we should pass through.

Many of the things which put our faith to the proof will suggest themselves if we consider what is the

faith that is necessary for life and work. It is not given to every one to be able to support the burden and the temptations of life by his own conviction of right; from a sense of the dignity of his own nature, and what he owes to it; though he can see or guess nothing beyond the dark curtain that bounds this world, and has nothing to hope or fear in another. Noble lives have been led with nothing else to support them; but most men need the strength that comes of the belief in a wise, and mighty, and loving Father; and from a conviction of the Divine Life which was lived on earth by His only Son, being the true life for man. This belief in a Father who wills and knows, and can accomplish, what is best for us is our support under the trials of life—this conviction that the highest life for man must be based on the example of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, is our strength against its temptations. Any of the riddles or the sufferings of life that shake our conviction of the wisdom and love of God, these are trials of our faith in such a God. Any of its allurements which make us doubt after all whether such a life as Christ's is the best, are trials of our faith in Him.

Men do not find it easy to reconcile themselves to such ignorance as they are compelled to live in. They find themselves ignorant alike of the past and of the future; they do not even know whether they ever lived in any previous state of existence before they were conscious of this one; they know almost as little, or quite as little, of their next stage of being. No one

comes to them from beyond the world to tell them of any life their souls may have had before they animated these bodies, or of the experience of their souls in the passage from one life to another, or of their condition in that other. They find death the universal lot, and sorrow the heritage of those who are left behind; and they find it falling alike on the evil and on the good, on the infant who has hardly tasted life, or the aged and worn out; and, most mysterious of all, on those who can least be spared; on the loved, the useful, and the gifted. They find Nature at war with man; now refusing him his needful sustenance, now overwhelming him with the sudden action of some of her unsubdued forces; they find their bodies subject to disease and pain—even the passage to a happier life often the keenest anguish of all. They find the innocent suffering for the guilty, or victims of their selfishness, negligence, or malignity. They find virtue difficult, temptation irresistible, doubt overshadowing conviction, and experience paralyzing hope. All these things seem so different to what might be expected in a perfect world, and from the love of a perfect God, that they try men's faith in Him; they put it to the test, that is to see whether it will bear the strain.

The Word of God seems to contemplate this strain. There is nothing wrong and nothing to be ashamed of in it. It would be a sign of some indifference about the great truths on which the Christian grounds his life, if none of its puzzles ever shocked or shook

him. St. James would not have spoken of "the trying of faith" if no circumstances likely to try faith ever occurred to men. He would not have spoken of it as bringing forth the fruits of patience if it had been a state of mind wholly to be condemned. On the contrary, he knew that in a condition in which there is no proof of the unseen—in which the most treasured convictions must be taken on faith—there must be occasions that would test it. He knew from his experience how many and painful would be the strains to which the constitution of nature and the course of society would expose it. If we feel no need of the belief in a Father above, and of all that is implied in that belief—no purpose in life which will make the example of Christ a necessity to us—it is easy to conceive that we may look on all the mysteries of the world, and all the trials of life that affect ourselves, with dissatisfaction, no doubt, but without curiosity; on all that do not with indifference. It is easy under such circumstances to say how the world might have been made better, but its imperfections and irregularities are no trial of faith to those who have no convictions to try.

The very notion of a test implies strength, and all who hold dear what they cannot see must expect to have their faith often tried as they pass through life, and do often experience this trial. It is a mark of the vigour and health of faith in God to examine and inquire into all about us that does not square with our convictions about Him; it is a sign of its vigour

too, to be able to hope on though the dawn is long coming.

The explanation of things that have shocked and puzzled us often comes later on in life, as many have found out, but sometimes it never comes; partly, perhaps, because we have set out with a wrong notion about the world we live in and the ways of men. There is much in the course of nature which disturbs Christians in their belief in the Fatherhood of God, much that unbelievers point to as a proof that He cannot be at once benevolent, omnipotent, and loving. But the doubt of the Christian and the argument of the unbeliever both seem to assume that the world was meant to be perfect—that man was put into a world ready-made, and adapted for his ease and comfort and happiness. And so of the order of society; it is assumed that our circumstances were meant to be such that virtue would be easy, and happiness would come as naturally as the air we breathe.

But the command “to replenish and subdue the earth” is a hint that it was given “rough hewn” for man to “shape;” that it was a vast mass of latent capacities rather than a developed machine which was given as the subject-matter of the brain and the will of man. The physical order of things and the moral atmosphere of life are the training-ground for raising man to the level of the ideal in the mind of God in creating him. Not in arraigning the wisdom and love of the Creator for the imperfections of His

work, but in perfecting the work which was designedly given to him imperfect, lies the highest exercise of our nature. It is easy to guess how poor and feeble a race man would be without the struggle against nature, for we know all the high qualities that are brought out by the strife; the resource and inventiveness, the resolution and energy which the pressure of circumstances and the cruelty of chance daily extort and exercise. How should we have been trained into men without these? Death would have found us full-grown infants, only less prepared than when we left our mother's knee, to begin the struggle out of which alone manhood can issue.

“In the reproof of chance lies the proof of men;” and those who lay to God's charge the faults of nature or the failures of life, should consider whether man has ceased to want this proof of manhood, and whether he has yet done all that can be done to subdue nature, and to make himself safe against its forces. Is it not rather true that hardly one of these accidents or calamities happen which distress us so much, without immediately suggesting how it might have been avoided, without setting us on at once to prevent its recurrence in the future?

We have already insured ourselves against many causes of sickness, starvation, and sudden death, not to mention other victories over nature. Is it not possible in these instances to penetrate the mind of God about ourselves—to regard Him as having the final and general welfare of the whole race at heart;

as viewing in a very different way from ours the passage from this life to the next; as subordinating the individual to the race; as regarding the departure of more or fewer before their time as of small importance compared with the perfecting the race, and this earth for the habitation of those who are made in His image, and are meant to complete it in all its lineaments?

We know very little, of course, about the meaning of the opposition and cruelty of nature; but we cannot derive arguments from our ignorance, and justify ourselves in charging God foolishly because something happens that we do not understand. We must know first His purpose in placing us here, and how that purpose is affected by what has happened, before we can question His wisdom or His love. In this very question of the struggle against nature His Spirit and our own experience have shown us something of His purpose; it would be wiser to argue from the known to the unknown, than from the unknown to what is equally obscure; from what obedience to His law has taught us of His will, rather than to infer His nature from circumstances we cannot comprehend.

And what is true of nature without is true of the moral life within. Faith is subject to the same trials here as when it looks on at the phenomena of the physical universe. As they witness the difficulties of virtue, the allurements of vice, the success of bad men, the poverty and suffering of the good, the obstructions put in the way of duty, the discourage-

ments opposed to the enthusiastic, the patronage by the vicious and indifferent of those who are ready to swim with the stream;—in all times faithful souls have wavered as they have noted these features of life, and have wistfully inquired their meaning. The unbelieving have pointed to them as signs that God does not rule, or that He is not wise and loving if He does.

They have been, and they are, trials of faith. No one can regard them without perplexity, unless he believes above all things that God's first design in creating us and placing us here is to form in us certain characters; to make us men of a particular kind. Bearing this in mind, it is easier to see how the trials of life may have the same effect upon one part of character that the opposition of nature has upon another; how the difficulties of God's moral government may try our faith just in the same way as the hardships of nature and of life try it. The convictions that sustain life can only be reared in the atmosphere of opposition, and faith would vanish away (with the need of it) if all things went well. But since men appear to be intended for higher degrees of communion with God, they must learn to approach Him nearer while they live, to strengthen their belief in His being and character by questioning its grounds. No strength would come from the choice of good, if there were no enticement to evil; nor from love of virtue, if vice were never triumphant. There could be no growth of character if our wills were not

free ; no trial of patience if limits were not set to our strength ; if our desires did not outrun our ability, if our aims did not surpass our powers, if our energies did not droop when the will was strong, if the flesh did not lust against the Spirit, if we could always “ do the things that we would.”

These are not all the moral difficulties we encounter in life, and their effect on character is not perhaps a sufficient account of them ; and there may still be some which we find it hard to reconcile with our notions about God. But their seeming purpose (as far as it has been discovered) is light enough about them to save us from rebellion or despair, and we are enough in the dark about others to call for the exercise of faith. This condition of insufficient light is the very arena of faith. With no hint from heaven it could not have been born ; in eyesight it must vanish away. But those who seize upon every clue that the perplexing problems of the earth and man afford them to strengthen their belief, will find explanations of many things that once looked hopeless ; and about harder trials of faith they will find that they have learned to be more patient of ignorance.

For it must be remembered, that as far as can be seen, we are intended to be in difficulties of this kind. To believe that God is all we mean by God ; that Christ's is the perfect life, in the face of appearances, and in the teeth of allurements to the contrary, is our spiritual discipline. We rise and grow by this opposition, just in proportion to the struggles that

conviction has cost us. Such convictions are often most real to those who have known what it is, for a time, to be without them, and to have had no support but an inward law of right to resist the currents of passion and self-interest. Those who profess to hold fast convictions of which it has pleased God for a time to deprive others who desire to serve Him, should ungrudgingly admit the nobleness of a life which, without the motives of a Divine faith, can still preserve the upright walk, the pure heart, and the loving devotion of self to the service of humanity. Men may admire such lives, and thank God for them, even though they add a fresh mystery to their present being.

But it must not be forgotten that those who claim higher hopes, and make profession of undoubting faith, are committed to at least such a life as is sometimes led without them. It is easy to say we believe in the Father and the Son, but the true expression of that belief is to aim in our individual lives at the perfection we ascribe to God; to set before our own the example of the human life we profess by saying, "I believe in Jesus Christ!" to consider the perfect life for man. What else does belief in Him amount to? How else than in practice can this conviction be expressed? The true infidelity which ruins states and degrades social life is not scientific scepticism, but the faithlessness which neither loves nor delights in what is good; which presses forward to no high aim, and shapes itself to no high ideal; which mocks at

the enthusiasm of those who sacrifice the joys of this life for the sake of the next, or themselves for the sake of others; which without hope or sympathy, while professing to believe in the Father and the Son, gives the true devotion of its life to pleasure, or power, or self-indulgence.

Let those who so often say that their faith has stood all trials; hitherto, believe in the power of their creed to purify and to exalt; let them encounter with it the turbulent reactions of vanity, desire, and self-will; let them give it free scope to act upon them in the impressionable moments of solitude, that they may exhibit its fruits in home-life, where the practical following of Christ is so important and so difficult. Faith so learnt and practised will follow them out into the world, whatever their work is; and without preaching or profession, only by a perceptible elevation of motive, will prove to many whose belief may want such support, that the faith which has made Christendom what it is, has not yet lost its power to make men the light of homes, and the strength of states.

EXPECTATION OF CHRIST.

ST. MATT. xi. 3.—“*Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another ?*”

THE explanation that is often given of this mission of the Baptist's disciples to Christ, that though his own mind was made up on the subject he sent his followers to satisfy theirs, is probably seldom satisfactory, though it is often accepted.

There is an unreality in it very unlike his character, and unworthy of all the actors in the scene. When he was convinced, his followers shared his conviction. When he said, “Behold the Lamb of God,” two of his disciples who heard him speak followed Jesus. If he had not begun to waver now, there would have been no need to send them for their assurance or for his own. But he may have thought that there was enough to shake his faith. He had been a great man; the leader of a popular movement; the first to discern the Redeemer; the herald of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Now the Redeemer was come; echoes of His mighty works pierced even into the dungeon; the kingdom was begun; and he was lonely, forgotten, and a prisoner. He might well have expected to be

among the first to be "set at liberty of those that were bound." So apt are we to measure social changes by their effect on ourselves; to estimate their value by our own share in their benefits. He was in fact disappointed in Christ for personal reasons, and His Master hints at this in the words with which he winds up his answer: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." Delicate as the hint was, it conveyed a rebuke; but He is not prevented from doing justice to the mission and character of John in His address to the people after the messengers had left Him.

Amongst the countrymen of Christ, John was not the only one disappointed. For various reasons, quite familiar to those who read the Gospels, there was a very widespread feeling of disappointment; and however little we may approve of the feeling, it is by no means difficult to account for it. It is much harder for us to realize the expectation of Christ's coming, than the disappointment with Him when He came. Not to mention the associations of so many peoples and so many centuries in which His coming has been remembered and celebrated, there is a natural difficulty in imagining ourselves to be looking forward to the coming of a Messiah, with all that is implied in that name. It is common to hear a longing for a great man to arise who shall let in the light on dark places, or cut social knots, or restore simplicity of life, or give expression to feelings with which many hearts are burning. But the case was different

then. The Comer was not only to change the condition of society, He was to change the relations of heaven and earth. He did effect the greatest social reformation the world has ever seen, though it was neither striking in appearance nor sudden in occurrence as it was expected to be. And He did more: He made not only a revolution, but a revelation; He revealed to Jew and Greek the Father who had been a mystery before; but His revelation lacked the same striking and visible features in which His revolution was wanting. In both cases exactly those features were absent of which the prospect must have wound up expectation to its utmost tension; exactly those to which it is so hard to imagine ourselves looking forward; and the difference between the anticipation and the reality is enough to account for the disappointment. But hard as modern thought and feeling have made it to realize a state of expectation of the Messiah, the effort should be made; for what we should anticipate from His coming is probably a true test of our actual relation to the Christ who has come and is gone, and is "with us always, even to the end of the world."

And it must be remembered that the men who did expect Him did not live in any remote antiquity, before the old empires; but rather on the verge of modern history. Trustworthy history goes back far beyond them; they had many of the books which we read now; many of the events which are old to us were old to them; many of the Messiah's country-

men live among us whose pedigrees might possibly be traced back centuries before the date of His birth. One is struck by the modernness of many of the ways and thoughts of men who lived long before Him. So that the effort to put ourselves in their position ought not to be so great as it looks. Its greatness shows the difference between looking forward to Christmas and looking forward to Christ. It might prove quite as useful an exercise for Advent to try in thought to put ourselves in the position of men who lived in that waiting-time, as to spend it in anticipation of a second coming of Christ. Of that coming we know next to nothing; of our own hearts, and of what Christ did and was and said, we know a good deal.

If we were looking forward to a Messiah in about a week's time, instead of to an anniversary of His birth, can we at all conceive what kind of expectations He would have to fulfil? It might be possible to guess some of them by considering what are the most urgent and vital inquiries of the day. He would be expected to answer a good many questions, and to solve a good many doubts. The main inquiries of all, What is the origin and destiny of man? who, what, and where is God? these would with confidence expect their solution from Him; and they are only two of the many speculative difficulties that He would be expected to settle. Almost every class in the community would look to Him for the removal of its practical evils. Many of the questions which exercise the thoughtful and benevolent—such as the relations

of rich and poor ; the elevation and education and housing of the numerous classes ; the distribution of land ; the reciprocal attitude of capital and labour ; the secrets of health and disease ; the best means of inspiring the wealthy classes with a more living interest in the problems of social and spiritual life, as an alternative to the see-saw of business and of amusement ;—these and other practical “ enigmas of life ” might well await, so it would seem, some light to fall upon them at His coming. Hope and curiosity would be wound up to their highest pitch at the prospect of such an Advent as this. Curiosity might even make men fail to notice how little share any deep longing of the heart to know more of God and to be more like Him had in their eager anticipation of the “ express image of the Father.”

Guesses would be rife at such a time as to the country and the class in society in which He would be born ; and it might be hard to hear, without some revulsion of feeling, the news that He was born in an out-of-the-way village and of the class of artisans. Some would expect Him to be born in a great seat of wealth or learning ; some would regard the class He sprang from as in antagonism to the institutions of the country ; some would think it more fitting that He should appear among those who naturally guide the thought or legislation of the people. All these feelings would be so much prejudice that would have to be overcome before we could receive it that “ this was Messiah which was for to come.” And if, as time

wore on, it came to be learnt that He gave no information about interesting questions; no answer to the "whence came we, and whither go we, or why are we here?" which are the permanent problems of thought; no description of God—only the exhibition of a godlike nature among us; no picture of heaven—only the mystic assurance, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you;" and if He proved to have no more news to tell about social than about speculative questions; no universal panacea for all evils; no cure of ignorance, poverty, vice, disease, and class animosities; nothing to give us by way of help out of all the evils of a crowded population but the precept to "love one another;" if these were the whole results of His coming, would not prejudice in the case of many end in disappointment? How few or how many would be among the "blessed who were not offended in Him"?

In some or all of these points He would no doubt fail to satisfy many; but we know, from the history of His Life, that the feelings which He excited did not end in mere disappointment. We know that He gave great dissatisfaction not only by what He failed to do, but by what He did. His life was a continual warfare against the two most influential classes in any community; against the rich, and against the teachers of religion. He denounced the hollowness of their worship; the hypocrisy of their good works; their oppression and contempt of the poor. He cut the ground from under the feet of the pretentious;

He exposed the unseemly nakedness of plausible lives ; and the selfishness of ceremonial almsgiving. No other words can equal the strength of His denunciations of the ways of men about Him eighteen hundred years ago. It might be found that He had something to say about us, and that no more in our case than in theirs would disappointment express all our feeling against Him. Every one can lay his finger on his own sore, and knows best where he would wince ; every one knows the skeleton in his own cupboard and the streak of light the Saviour's words would cast all across his life, bringing out the hidden things of darkness.

But to awaken individual consciences would not perhaps make Him unpopular, for no one would confess to his neighbour the stab which pierced him. It would be when He took to denouncing classes, to protesting against habits sanctioned by custom ; against indulgences protected by fashion ; against ways of thought, modes of worship, currents of feeling that had become traditional ; that disappointment would be turned into hostility.

It is too easy to see how "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" "Is not this the carpenter?" "Show us a sign from heaven;" "If thou be the Christ, show Thyself;" "Art Thou He that should come?"—how such utterances of defaulting hopes turned into hatred, and ended in, "Crucify Him ! crucify Him !" It would be sanguine to expect that all our social economy would pass His examination ;

that He would see nothing to expose or condemn in all the ways of politics, religion, business, pleasure, or domestic life. He might have something to say about the party-feeling which so warps and discolours facts, that a plain man finds it hard to get at the truth about them ;—about the religious beliefs and observances which separate the men they were meant to unite ; about the frauds which disgrace commercial life ; about the pleasures which enervate the character of those who indulge in them, and degrade the large class who live by being their ministers ; about the excess and the tyranny of the whole system of sport in England ; about the want of love in homes, and the growing estrangement in feeling and interests between parents and children. This is not very unlike the line He took in Palestine ; but if He adopted it now, how much self-love He would wound ! how much malignity He would exasperate ! Disappointment would feebly express what men would feel about Him after this experience ; and if we had to look forward to such an arrival ; to One who could and would expose and denounce as He did, we should say, “ Who may abide the day of His coming ? ” with an apprehension quite as genuine as that with which we regard the time when He shall come at the right hand of Power and in the clouds of heaven ; and with quite as good reason.

But even this was not the whole of the offence He gave to His contemporaries. Before prejudice had issued in deadly hatred, He offended them in

a way in which it would be very possible to give offence now. There is nothing that an old society is more intolerant of than anything that is unusual; what is called unconventionality. Our Saviour came as a teacher, and early in His career He disregarded every decorum and violated every convention of the religious teachers of His time. He lived His own simple life, most human, most divine in its simplicity, among men—talking, eating, and drinking with rich and poor, with clean and unclean, with publicans and sinners, with unwashed hands and travel-stained feet; and we know what was said of Him. The reproach of His natural ways and pure reality to the frozen social ritual of His day, was as hard to bear as His denunciation of vice. We may measure our tolerance of such a phenomenon as His life among us, not by the allowances we make for genius, but by our tolerance of ordinary men who try to do good in their own way, independent of the world's opinion—often not regardless of it, if we knew their hearts. There is nothing we are so impatient of as eccentricity; and we mean by it all conduct that does not run in the grooves which custom and fashion lay down. Every one knows this: when nothing else can be said against a man who is doing a great work, this small hole is picked in his character—that he is so unconventional. It is a virtue to be unconventional when convention chokes the free development of a nature; when it represses the utterance of truth;

when it hampers a career, or dams up the natural current of sympathy between men or classes.

After expectation had long been strained with looking forward to Him that should come, is it not too likely that He would add to all His other causes of offence when He came, this one more—that He was unconventional?

Something like this which I have tried to conjecture might be men's experience of Christ if He came among them now. If it seems to furnish any better reason for the disappointment expressed in the question, "Art Thou He that should come," or any more excuse for the hatred which crucified Him, it seems a natural inference that to those who think so, looking forward to the anniversary of His birth is a pleasanter prospect than anticipating His actual appearance. It shows at least to those who cannot in their hearts deny that such a life would disappoint their hopes of one who was to come from heaven to give light on the earth, that they must put out of their hearts and lives all that cannot bear His glance or His words; all the unreality that prefers form to truth; all the profession that bears no fruit in practice. For how can there be any joy at the thought that He has come, if His presence among us would only awaken opposition and alarm?

To those alone belong the true joys of Christmas who can see in that life the true picture of the life of God; who find in the new commandment a solution of social problems, and a remedy for social evils; who

find in His promise a relief from the bondage of sin, and in His sympathy a relief from the burden of sorrow ; who find realized in Him their ideal of the manhood of men and of the tenderness of women ; the satisfaction of all their wants and the solution of all their doubts ; the fulfilment of all, and more than all, they dared to hope.

CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILIZATION.

PHIL. iv. 8.—“*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*”

THE many-sidedness of St. Paul's teaching could hardly be better illustrated than by the contrast between the teaching of this verse and what goes before it: “The Lord is at hand; be careful for nothing ; but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God.” This and similar passages have seemed ample justification for the fanaticism of “Fifth Monarchy Men,” and for Latter-Day Saints ;” for those whose vivid apprehension of the unseen has made them neglect the only means for attaining a knowledge of it; for those who have made the precept “Be careful for nothing” an excuse for abandoning all care of themselves or others. But in the words of the text we pass from what (taken by itself) would seem like the exhortation of an enthusiast to the precepts of a lofty philosophy. And the point to be observed is not that the two duties are not

incompatible—the shallow contrast so often pointed—but that they are mutually dependent the one on the other, and that neither can be achieved without the other.

The friends and the enemies of Christianity alike insist on this incompatibility. We are warned on the one hand to “set our affections on things above,” to “work out our own salvation,” as if such excerpts were the whole of the wide teaching of Holy Scripture. We are wearied with contrasts between the “Church and the world,” between “earthly and heavenly things,” between “this world and the next,” between “the spirit and the flesh.”

The times are gone by when men fled into the desert to be nearer God, as though they thought the farther they fled from God’s image the nearer they were to Him; but they still seek refuge from what they call the world, to fly into another world of some religious community; evading the highest and the hardest service, and losing the most elevating discipline that the world has to give. And as we are warned by friends to shun the world, so has Christianity been before now taunted by its enemies with the reproach that it tends to make bad citizens. The inevitable tendency (so it has been said) of a religion which teaches men to look mainly to a future life, and to find their present happiness in that hope, and in contemplation of the unseen, is to make them unfit and indisposed to do the most and the best they can for the men about them—a postulate which is

rightly assumed to be true as a description of the duty of all men.

No doubt the warning and the reproach have both been justified ; on the one hand by those who have lost sight of the use of the world whilst its abuses forced themselves on their eyes ; and on the other by those who forget the motive and the restraint of the unseen world in all their use of and contact with what is seen. For St. Paul's two precepts—to be careful for nothing because the Lord is at hand, and to have regard to everything that the best men love and aim at—hang very closely together. It is that consciousness of invisible realities (the modern equivalent for the phrase and the idea of “the Lord is at hand”) which supplies the motive and sustains the energy of all the efforts after all that is true, and honest, and pure, and just, and lovely. Life would lose its poetry, and men would be very dull without this presence always understood, sometimes expressed.

The experience of times which have been so bad—like periods of siege, pestilence, or famine—that men have begun to disbelieve in God, by no means teaches that it is the tendency of the denial of everything beyond and beside this world to lead men to make the most and the best of human life while it lasts.

Such times have often been distinguished by selfish disregard of the sufferings of others, by selfish indulgence in such pleasures of sense as were within reach. It would be natural to think that a belief

that there was no one else to care for men would move men to care for one another; that a belief that there was nothing after this life would encourage them to treasure and to elevate it. It may be true of a few highly cultivated men, but this has not been its effect on the mass.

Everywhere and always the sense of the worth of this life has been in proportion to the intensity of conviction in the existence of another; everywhere and always the sense of an invisible order of things about us has increased the value of the best features of the present world. The idea that there was a happier lot in store for men hereafter has acted as a stimulus to improve the conditions of society, not as a permission to leave men in their ignorance or squalor or slavery.

Consciously or unconsciously men have combined the caution and the precept of St. Paul. "The Lord is at hand" has been the motive, not only for the personal holiness of the Christian centuries, but for the persistent effort to improve the lot of the helpless, which has distinguished them. And in spite of Fanaticism and Negation they have caught his catholic spirit and claimed, as the sphere of Divine Inspiration and the arena of Christian discipline, all the graces, as well as all the virtues of life. It might be necessary to remind Christians in a Pagan city—as it has been necessary to remind Christians in Christian countries—of the duty of truthfulness to Pagans or to Heretics; that there were parts and aspects of their country's laws and worship, of its memories and

associations, which were venerable; that there was a purity of motive as necessary as the purity of life; that all that was lovely was not to be found in the new faith; but that there was much that was sacred and beautiful in the ties and the traditions, in the life and the accomplishments of the old.

Whatever was well spoken of; whatever virtue men prized; whatever won their honest applause; to these they were to have regard; *not*, notwithstanding that the Lord was at hand, but because He was. This inspired conception is the secret of European progress. The spiritual aim has been the secret of material progress, and the area of the Spirit's work has been gradually widening, to include within the sphere of duty to God all that men admire in their neighbours' characters or covet as ornaments to their own. And the motive has been one which might have been supposed to diminish the value of everything but the sternest duty, or the most ardent devotion. Honour and courtesy, patriotism and hospitality, fair-mindedness and freedom from prejudice,—these are samples of social virtues, not always recognized as Christian duties, and not monopolized by Christians; existing before and beside them, but distinctly placed by St. Paul alongside the cardinal point of all religious life—the belief in the presence of God; and distinctly growing and spreading in proportion as his letters are read. No doubt he intended to include in the same recommendation accomplishments which can perhaps scarcely be called virtues; but which (it is easy to

see) may spring naturally out of the same belief ; may naturally be regarded as part of the worship which various men pay in many different ways to their Creator.

The sense of the presence of God has spread over two continents the art and science which were confined to a few spots before ; and the perfect literature of one small state, under the stimulus of the same conviction, has developed into the great and wide-spread gift of matter to read, for all classes, ages, and conditions.

It is very significant that the great teacher of Europe should have proclaimed the connexion between the belief in the presence of God, and the cultivation of all that makes life worth having, in the first city in which he set foot in Europe, and that the two convictions should have grown and spread together. With the belief came the motive for the study ; with the practice of all that is true, and pure, and lovely, and venerable comes the confirmation of the belief. For God is not only the moving cause of this devotion to what is beautiful in thought or life, in art or nature ; but He is the object of it all. It all reveals Him.

There is no need to go into details ; but the fact that the sense of the beauty of nature is curiously deficient where art is absent, or backward ; that art has grown out of a sense of the beauty of nature, but that this sense does not spread, hardly exists where art is not ; this fact would seem to show the need of man's efforts to reveal God to men. The Lord was not in the

wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, any more than in the flowers and "the countless laughter of the ocean waves," until study of nature found Him there; until it made men *conscious* of nature under the influence of a sense that God was beneath and above it all; a sense which in turn revealed to them more and more of the God who had first inspired them to love and study nature. As we learn His moral character from man, and as men justly feel that they are being deluded, if (as we are sometimes told) the moral qualities of man are no index to those of God; so do we infer the features of His mind from nature, and rise to an apprehension of it from the study and practice of all that is pure and true and lovely, which no mystic could reach with the utmost stretch of imagination. "No man hath seen God at any time;" but the conviction that He *is* has given fresh worth and beauty to much that men by nature love; has given value and preciousness to many qualities that would be lightly thought of without this belief. And as all that He has inspired comes to be known, He begins to stand out in almost human reality.

Instead of the shadowy abstraction of a Presence, or a Tendency, He is (not invested with) but the embodiment of grace and truth; and we begin to see with love and pride that humanity is indeed His child; and yet with a consciousness of imperfection that keeps pace with pride, that the only begotten Son is a title that belongs to One alone.

In these days we are rather getting out of the

narrowness of those who taught us that the world was wholly bad; that its pleasures were snares of Satan; and much else of which the phraseology was once only too familiar. Of course it was a creed very difficult to square with facts. Why were our surroundings such as they were, if they were all to be shunned? What was the meaning of the desires and instincts corresponding to external objects, if they were all to be crushed? Who was to do the work of this world, if every one spent all his time and thoughts in contemplating and preparing for another? No doubt excellent men have often been disquieted by such teaching. Perhaps they have taken their pleasure under protest, and have felt only half-satisfied with their work in the world. The feeling may linger, though the outspoken teaching is rare. Religious men who are engaged in what is called secular work may not be able to see the bearing of that which consumes all their energies and thoughts upon their profession as Christians. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth" may ring like a knell in their ears, and they may find it hard to reconcile what they must do if they are to live at all, with what they profess to be and to believe. Of course no sanction can make a selfish career noble; a base man may make the noblest calling vile, and no dignity of subject-matter can redeem work in which every consideration is sacrificed to the rapid accumulation of money. This is assumed. But men who rejoice in their work may want to be assured that they not only may,

but must, work at that particular calling for which they are qualified. What they *can* do is what God requires of them. They might like to serve God more directly, and to see that they were spreading on earth the kingdom of Christ. But the fact that they are set, or fit, or called to do other work, and can do it well, is an indication that this is the very form of self-sacrifice that God requires of them. It is easy to think of professions which have quite unrivalled opportunities for teaching and spreading the love of truth and justice. What an engine, for instance, for the diffusion of these ideas and of this love is the great profession of the Law !

And who can rival the painter, the sculptor, the poet, the dramatist, the novelist, in their power of diffusing the love of all that is pure and lovely and of good report ? Names might be mentioned of artists and of writers who have done so much for the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth that almost any one, if he had done as much, might lie down, content to die with "Nunc Dimittis" on his lips. We are rid of much of this narrowness ; but probably there are still many who can hardly feel that they not only may, but must, serve God in their office, or studio, or study, though they might choose some other work.

And yet there may still remain some who have not got out of the way of regarding God rather as a kind of High Priest or Pope than as the Ruler of an universe, with mind and heart inconceivably large

in foresight and insight and in love. He need not be thought of merely as considerately allowing each man to do his work in the world; but may rather be believed to demand from each, as a tribute, whatever work he can do best; as having set each with his appointed faculties to his proper work, and as exacting that service of him and no other. No one of us can imagine the manifold agencies required for the perfection of this world's movement; many must be so subtle as to escape our eye. We cannot choose, nor all have one part; nor yet believe (if they are all His) that there are degrees of sacredness in them. The world has nearly outgrown this narrow conception which divides sacred from secular work; but not all men yet have risen to the happiness of believing that their daily work is sacred and the tribute to the Kingdom of Heaven which is required of them.

And we are encountered, besides, with a reactionary narrowness in another direction. We are told now that the world is all-sufficient for a man; that it absorbs all his energies, supplies him with motives, and presents to him an object of devotion: that he can know nothing about the unseen; that thought about it and working for it only draws off men's energies from necessary duties. This is not the occasion for entering into any argument as to the probability of the existence of Invisible Persons and invisible realities, though of course, if only a strong probability for their existence could be advanced, it would place us in relations which would

have to be recognized in any view of life as a whole. The charge may be best met by facts. Is it true that men's consciousness of their relation to an unseen God and their prospect of a boundless life have made them neglect themselves, their duties, or their fellow-creatures? Is not the whole experience of the Christian centuries against such an assertion? Have not men, on the contrary, grown in the sense of duty to themselves and to all about them, whether man, brutes, or inanimate nature; under the influence of Christianity? Have they not grown in those special studies, art and literature, which it is said ought to be cultivated for their own sake, since the revelation of Christ has given a shape and reality to the idea of God He never had before; since His appearance in the form of a servant has given men a sense of brotherhood with all those to whom art and science, grace and literature, can as yet bring as little joy as they can supply motive to any one to devote them to the service of mankind, if the idea of God is eliminated from the world? Whatever may be said about religion being a hindrance, or at least useless to the work of the world, the paradox remains, that the religion which taught its followers to set their affections on things above has seen in its own centuries and in its own continent the steady growth, just in proportion as it has grown, of all that elevates, strengthens, and purifies men; of all those charms and graces of life for the sake of which those who are beginning to say it can be dispensed with think "life best worth living."

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

EPH. iii. 15.—“*The whole family in heaven and earth.*”

THIS day is dedicated to the memory of the multitude that no man can number who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God, most of whose names are not written in any calendar of saints. The celebration of the memory of the dead has come down to us from very early times, times when there were no Christians and very few Saints; and it was probably connected in those days with the rejoicings which took place at the close of harvest. It is still associated with merry-making and half-Pagan rites by some nations; while to others it is a day of mournful observance; of tender dwelling on the memory of the departed; of visits to their tombs; of recalling their traits of character and the active virtues of their lives.

We bear witness to this universal feeling in the existence of a bond uniting the living and the dead when we repeat, in the words of our Creed, “I believe in the communion of saints.” Popular superstition, religious and irreligious, goes much beyond this, and

confesses by its fears a connexion between the living and the dead (though neither may be Saints) which it would sometimes be glad to be able to shake off; or a fond desire goes much beyond what reason or Scripture sanction, in its loving belief about the communion that is possible between those who remain and those who are gone before. We have no ground, either in reason or Scripture, for thinking that the dead, however good or however dear to us, can hear our prayers or know our thoughts. The utmost effort to project our thoughts or feelings to them, as far as we know, can meet with no response; of their tenderest anxieties about us we never can be conscious. It is impossible to say that our thoughts and feelings may not affect each other unconsciously, because it is impossible to say what spiritual influences may affect a spirit, nor how they may be conveyed. Some of the impulses and moods, regrets and resolutions, which pass over us, may be due to the mysterious connexion existing between the souls of men, but there is no ground for this belief, and there are few phases of thought or feeling connected with our departed friends that cannot be traced to the influence of memory; and none of the holy thoughts and good desires that sweep across our souls which we must not ascribe to the Spirit of God. To believe that the dead can hear our prayers or know our thoughts, would be to ascribe to them one of the attributes of God; to treat them as if they could, would not only be robbing Him of due homage, but

putting ourselves in a false relation to them with whom we can only have any communion by being in fellowship through the Spirit with the Father and the Son. For it is only by common relation to Him that we can be united in any fellowship on earth or in heaven. "That they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us."

But those who have knit their souls together here and have become one in heart, while they have an opportunity of sharing thoughts and feelings, may preserve the same communion when they are parted by death that they had in life, though neither can give the other any sign of it. Space and time do not separate those whose hearts have once been knit together. Long years and wide oceans may part them, but they feel that their hearts are one, and they know that thoughts they have shared will be awakened in each by the same events; and that the same hopes and anxieties will come and go to each as the times are bright or cloudy, as they remember in the days they were together. And why not when one is more wholly spirit than he was before, and the other spiritualized by the thought of the condition of his lost friend, and of his possible nearness to him, though they seem so far asunder? To be one in heart and thought, this is communion; there is no more reason that death should dissolve it than that distance should; and those who cling to this belief may assure themselves that there may be a true

communion of saints, though they offer no prayers to them, and see no miracles done by them.

But what are the conditions of this communion? for this is the practical point, and this will suggest the reason why this clause is inserted in our Creed. No one would be anxious to claim a continuation of intimacy between the bad. Endless communion with them would not be a privilege, but a curse. The wickedest men might be intimately acquainted with each other's thoughts and feelings, and the knowledge might only produce common misery and hate. This knowledge might continue beyond the grave, and bring only torture there, if their union had been based on what was bad in each, and they had been united for evil purposes. Of course men who are far from Saints may be united in a very true friendship, but this can only be when each recognizes under the crust of evil what is good in the other, and this discovery unites them. Then the recollection, both in the living and the dead, may be the one bright spot in a black memory, and each may have a true communion with what is good in the other; each may be purged by it and bring forth more good. But association in evil, or for evil, can never produce union, nothing but discord; or only bonds we struggle to break here, or recollections we try in vain to escape from when the outward bond is dissolved by death. And this bondage in discord, which comes of partnership in evil, is the opposite of communion; it is a disunion worse than the blackness of total ignorance or of final separation.

The first condition then of this communion is that it be a communion in good; a fellowship in Christ; a friendship formed between men for the good there is in each; for the good they may do, each to the other, or, by common action, to other men. This is the meaning of our Saviour's prayer, that "we may be one in Him," and it finds its confirmation in the reason and experience of men. We may not know what it is to be "one in Christ," but we know very well what is the character of our several intimacies; whether we have been attracted by what is good or evil in another, whether our influence is for good or evil on him. Just as a partnership in sin is worse than a solitary crime—and the law bears witness to the common sense of mankind in punishing the results of a conspiracy much more severely than the crime of an individual—so do revelation, and human nature too, declare that there is something in companionship in good, in the knitting of souls one to another from the sight of what is good in each, in mutual trust and in common effort, as much above the level of human nature, as a conspiracy to do wrong together is below it; something that has its origin above and beyond humanity, has its spring in the Spirit of God, and cannot be dissolved by death because it is based on what is undying and eternal. Other communion than this there may be, but it is not for us to claim; we may find it true some day, and it may add to the bitterness of our thoughts as we look back; but it is not one of the "things which a Christian ought to

know and believe for his soul's health," except in the way of warning, to prevent him from being a partner of other men's sins, and to save him from making other men worse by sharing his.

There can be no communion then such as we desire, except between those who have been united by a common love of good; if we would be one, it must be in Christ, in this world or in the world to come. But those who claim this high privilege of communion between their spirits and the spirits of the good who are gone to their rest, must endeavour to be one in heart with them while they are here, and must endeavour to live and walk in their spirit when they are gone. We may admire what is good in those about us without trying to imitate it; every act and every impulse may be at variance with a character we love and revere. A parent may deserve and awaken such feelings in a child, and the child may be nothing but an anxiety and sorrow to him. A child may have a parent whom he cannot respect, though he cannot help loving him. Where is the communion between them? what hope can they have, when the parent is beyond the grave, of any community of thoughts and feelings, who were so widely parted when they were together? If there can be no assurance of communion except between what is good in each, how can it exist when the good was on one side only? how can it exist when the one knows that there is no sympathy in the other with what is good in him? How can separation fail to

sever a tie which daily intercourse barely held together? Death is a real parting to those who have nothing in common, and a bitter one to those who feel that they have little in common with some they love best.

Those of us then who long to believe in this communion, and do not like to think that death will end their fellowship with some of their friends, should try while God keeps them together here, to grow like what is good in those they love, that they may not lose them when they go, but that fellowship in good on earth may be continued in the communion of saints in heaven. And not only while we live with the good and the beloved on earth, but when they have left us (if we are sincere in believing in a communion of Saints) must we continue to live and walk in the spirit of those we love. We claim this communion, and try to believe that our departed parents and friends are watching over us. If we believe this of our friends, let us try to remember how constant is God's care, how omnipresent is His watchful eye! If we believe in the guardian angels of those we love being present and communing with us, let us secure that communion which we can achieve. The memory of their love and their warnings is with us; the image of their examples is before us; does the spirit of their life and words guide our life, or do we live as if they could not know anything we do? Is their memory no restraint, no guidance, no encouragement, and no inspiration? If last words are forgotten, and last

looks effaced, then be sure that, however loudly we may profess the truth of the communion of Saints, we do not believe in it; for we are not trying to make it true, either by cherishing the communion there once was, or by forming within ourselves such a character as could have communion with any Saint. Let all those who have parents, friends, relations, dead or absent, put their belief in the communion of Saints to this test, and then pray to God that they may come to believe it and live as if they did.

And there is another way in which a practical belief in this doctrine may be shown, and by which men may attain to a belief in what they profess, if they have it not already; and that is, by freely acknowledging the good there is in other men, and seeking union with them on the ground of what they believe and love in common. It is comparatively easy to discern and to acknowledge what is good in people we like for other reasons—in persons belonging to our own family, or circle, or station in society, or the members of our own party in religion or politics. It is when people are separated by interest, by association, or by opinion, that the difficulty arises. Men find it hard to give opponents the same credit for generous actions or disinterested lives that they freely accord to members of their own party or persuasion. That is to say, they refuse communion with what is good in others because their opinions differ on points unconnected with the common ground they share with them. Nothing is more frequent in poli-

tical life than to impute bad motives to account for good deeds ; and though happily this injustice does not leaven English life except at times of political excitement, it cannot be denied that at such times, and in political life generally, the tendency of difference of opinion to separate men is stronger than the tendency of a belief in one Lord and one Faith, of common hope and effort for the good of all, to draw them together. We may hope that some of those who are most at variance now, may some day come to see and to acknowledge that in their highest aspirations both were one ; in their conflicting efforts both were pure. But meanwhile, what is this unbelief in the good of those who differ from us but a practical denial of the attracting and cohesive power of a love of truth and seeking after good ?

And in the sphere of religion it must be admitted that the want of power in mere goodness to attract and retain fellowship is even more apparent. No more melancholy proof of it could be found than the use or abuse of the word "communion," which (as used as a name for religious bodies) has so entirely lost its sense that it has come to signify now rather separation than unity, rather exclusion than comprehension.. Religious excitement, unlike political, has no period of calm ; it permeates life incessantly, and shows itself, now in controversy, now in social exclusiveness, to such an extent that to differ on certain points of Christian doctrine seems almost a greater bar to friendship with Christians, than not to be a Christian at all. This

could not be if it were not for the fatal effect of difference of opinion in blinding men to the good there is in those from whom they differ. For the amount of Christian doctrine we hold in common with those from whom our lives are so wide apart, is enough, and more than enough—in those who truly believe and try to act up to what they profess—to secure a unity of character and effort strong enough not only for the affection of friends but for a communion of Saints. But we are slow to recognize what is good in those who take a view ever so slightly different from our own of what Christ has taught us both. We go beyond this, and are forward to impute, each party to the other, interested motives for the most disinterested efforts for the common good. We are ready to deny to others the special virtues of our own communion; we are slow to allow them the same graces and virtues of private life which we know by experience to exist amongst ourselves, and which we might find among them if we were ready to carry into practice the belief we profess in the communion of saints, by making the good we already know a means of knowing more, and a reason for union with those from whom we are parted for no reason now. When we next declare our belief in the communion of saints, it would be well to ask ourselves whether we are united in heart to all that we know of what is saintly now; whether we do not find it easier to be at one with the worse men of our own party, than with the better of those from whom we differ. We cannot have an exclusive communion

of Saints in the world to come ; and we may find then perhaps that want of sympathy with the good has so chilled our hearts as to make communion impossible with those whom it would be our highest happiness to love.

It is hard to conclude without alluding to the form of this belief in the communion between the living and the dead which is known as Spiritualism. It would not be right to speak hardly of it from this place, because there may be persons present to whom this belief is some consolation, and they have no opportunity of defending it. But it is at least true of it that it is attended by circumstances that make it suspicious ; that it violates the first principle of spiritual communication—if we may judge from God's ordinary mode of dealing with us, who always influences our spirits either by some agency of this world, or by the direct action of His Spirit, and never by audible words or visible forms from beyond the grave—that it violates the first principle of physics, in ascribing material acts to spiritual existences, insomuch that the adherents of this belief should rather be called materialists ; that it has never yet shown any reason for belief in so stupendous a revolution in all we have ever learnt about God and ourselves, by any single revelation of the smallest benefit to mankind at large ; that it claims for men, both living and dead, a power never exercised by God Himself ; that it confers that power, in the case of the living, not on all men, as all God's great spiritual gifts are bestowed, but on men and

women here and there, apparently by no means distinguished from others by having more of the Spirit of God in them, in some cases certainly marked by characteristics inconsistent with guidance by the Holy Spirit at all; and that these communications alleged to take place between the living and the dead can seldom correctly be termed a communion of Saints. The title of Saint in many cases would hardly be claimed by themselves or their friends, for either party. The conversation which is reported to go on could hardly be dignified with the name of spiritual communion; while to those who believe in the awfulness of this life, with a wall between it and the other, and the greater awfulness of communications from beyond the grave, it is incredible that such communications can be made by and to such persons, in manners and for objects so unworthy (to say the least of it) as we hear they are.

And if the object claimed for them is more serious, what hope can we have that those to whom all Scripture, Life, and Nature speak in vain, will listen to a voice from the grave; that those who hear not Moses and the prophets would be persuaded if one rose from the dead? The true antidote to such a fancy is to believe more in what is spiritual and less in what is magical; more in the Divine Spirit who pervades the universe, and makes spiritual our common acts and daily utterances, if we submit ourselves to Him; to believe not less, but more, in the constant action of spirit on spirit, whether here or beyond the grave; to refine and elevate our own spirits that our spiritual communica-

tions may be of good and not of evil, so that we may part without remorse from those we have known here ; and with less regret, in hope of a happy reunion, from those who leave us behind ; to cleave to what is good in all, and trust for eternal communion with them to that ; and not to hope for any voice of ours to penetrate there ; nor for any voice from there to reach us save such as are heard in the conscience and whispered in the hearts of those who have tried and known one another, and have found a rock of goodness whereon to base their love and trust.

THE WORLD.

ST. JAMES i. 27.—“ *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*”

A good many definitions of religion have been attempted both by its enemies and its friends, and so far as each of them has come near the truth it has included the principle which is the essence of the definition of St. James.

Viewed either from its practical or spiritual side, as a mode of life or a habit of mind, the essence of religion is self-surrender. It finds expression in practice in the devotion of time and energy to the service of others—condensed into the brief injunction to “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction”—though many are called to serve their fellows in wider and less direct ways, and can only now and then get the help and elevation that come from contact with suffering while they are trying to help and comfort sufferers. And self-surrender expresses itself also in a habit of mind, or in a disposition of the heart. It is this surrender of self to the service of others and to its spiritual surroundings that constitutes religion.

There is much activity of religious life nowadays, and men are seeking new religions or developing old ones ; imagining that, by some fresh addition to a creed, or by accepting some new dogma, they are approaching nearer to the truth. There are speculations as to the being and nature of God ; as to the person and work of Christ ; as to the modes of communication of Divine Grace. Men in various ways are seeking after God, as if He was some one to be found ; as if He was not everywhere, all in all, all that there is in each ; as if it was not "in Him that we live, and move, and have our being." The very phrases that are current bear witness to the same self-consciousness, and are incompatible with the very idea of self-surrender. "To belong to a persuasion," "to profess a creed," "to accept a dogma," though they may have their convenience in the vocabulary of the machinery of worship, are yet phrases which imply rather that men are seeking or making a religion for themselves, than accepting the facts to which they are born, and inhaling the atmosphere by which they are surrounded. To realize the universality of God ; that we come from, live in, and go to Him ; that, as the saying is, He is "in the air," and we cannot escape Him ; to give ourselves up to the Spirit we cannot see, instead of to the matter we can see ; to rest and be tranquil in that self-devotion,—this is the spiritual side of religion which seems to be implied in St. James's practical definition of a religious life. And it is by this inference that the first part of his definition is

connected with the second. Not only must the work of a man's life (whatever it is) be a conscious service of men, but the consecration of himself must be to God and not to the world. A life of useful work without, of undivided homage of the heart within, is a very complete idea of religion, and it is one which can only be realized in the world, or in some world. For wherever men are is their world, so that we even speak of the future life as the world to come. The influence upon us of men who are in the world, or the reaction upon ourselves of the nature we brought into it, this is the world to each of us. We must make up our minds to the fact that we cannot be in the world and out of it at the same time; that we cannot live upon earth and not be in a world of some sort. If we could succeed in escaping from the world altogether we should of course not be influenced by others; but there would remain the action of the same spirit that there is in other men upon ourselves. We might avoid evil influences from without, but we should not be free from evil within; we might keep ourselves more pure from external evil, but we should at the same time lose all chance of doing good. And this, as far as we can see, would be to sacrifice possibly the main end for which we were born. It is not possible either to ignore or to escape from the world; and it would be strange if it were possible, as it seems to be the appointed means of man's education. Escape from it in the selfish hope of escaping from evil, and seeking individual salvation in seclusion, is often prompted

by one form of the spirit of the world. For the spirit of the world manifests itself in various forms. It is common to hear the world spoken of as if it consisted of those who live a good deal in society ; who spend a good deal of time in pleasure ; who lead what is called a gay life ; but this is only one of its manifestations ; perhaps not the least innocent of them. It is quite possible for a man who lives alone and shares in none of the pleasures of society to be as deeply imbued with this spirit as the gay and the reckless and the profuse. He may look out with religious condemnation on the gay world, or look down upon it with contempt ; not because he is not worldly himself, but because he is ; because he is filled with a spirit just as much at enmity with God as theirs, and derived from the same source. He may regard the others as "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," and be himself a lover of neither the one nor the Other. He may look upon them as spotted with the world, and be himself dyed deep with its stain.

For a censorious temper springs of necessity from some worldly motive. Either it can find no pleasure in the pure sources of enjoyment common to all ; or it is stung with a sense of neglect ; or it is discontented with its lot ; or it has no trust in God ; or no love for man ; or no pity for the feeble. In any case its ruling force comes from the world that it condemns, and shows itself in another form of the worldliness from which it recoils. Probably every one, after a little reflection, would agree in classing the self-tor-

mentors, the censorious, and the scornful among the worldly ; but not every one would be prepared for the hint conveyed in this definition of religion by St. James. It cannot have been without a purpose that he warned people, even while they were visiting the fatherless and the widow in affliction, to keep themselves unspotted from the world. He seems to hint at the possibility of being worldly, not only in spite of such an antidote, but at the possibility of being worldly in such work ; of doing it from a worldly motive ; or in a worldly manner ; of even being made more worldly by doing it. It is not necessary to speak of the cases in which such work is done for the motive of gaining a reputation, of pleasing some one, or getting his good opinion, for these are probably very rare, and further because such persons can hardly be deceiving themselves.

Religious hypocrisy is the very spirit of the world, as our Lord showed when He singled out the professors of religion at Jerusalem as types of the world. But such charitable work may seek no applause of men and yet be worldly ; as worldly as a Front-de-Bœuf's dying endowment of religion to atone for a life of sin. It may be suggested, that is, by uneasiness at a soft and smiling life of enjoyment, and a desire—possibly unconscious—for some make-weight to it. It may arise from no sympathy with the suffering, but only from love of self. And no doubt there is danger also not only of undertaking such work from a wrong or poor motive, but of evil arising from the work itself ; of its fostering a subtle form of

worldliness ; of its producing self-complacency with work and the results of work, instead of mistrust of both ; of its ceasing to be spontaneous and becoming mechanical ; of its producing pride and fussiness and love of managing, instead of humility at the thought that man's dealings with the world have brought the world so low ; thankfulness for the power and chance of being useful ; self-reproach at being able and willing to do so little ; love to God for the wide love that makes all our puny efforts look so cold and small.

People who lead a serious, or a busy, or a religious life, are fond of talking of the hollowness of pleasure and of the superficial joys of society ; but it should be remembered that, as there may be pleasure without happiness, and society without friendship ; so there may be the quietest domestic circles without love ; the most active usefulness without unselfishness ; the most secluded retreat without repose of spirit ; the closest association without communion of soul.

The notion that society is more worldly than solitude, that numbers make the worldly spirit, is to be met with again in the estimate of the relative morality of town and country. We hear large towns and the slums of London spoken of as if they were in an especial manner the hot-beds of vice and crime ; but statistics do not bear this out. The darkest crimes of blood and lust are committed where trees are rustling, and brooks are babbling, and birds are singing, and " Sweet Auburn " quite holds its own in the deadly race of evil. It is no more possible to fly

from the spirit of the world than it is to fly from the presence of God. If I go into the slum, it is there ; or into the study, or into the saloon, it is there also ; if I take the wings of the morning and fly into the happy valley or to the mountain-top, there too it finds and holds me. .

It presents itself to one man as a desire for society and popularity ; it prompts another to shun society, perhaps because he thinks himself too good for it ; though society may be both sought and shunned from noble motives. The wealth on which one man prides himself, his neighbour may despise ; but the pride and the scorn may spring from the same source. It is by no means always or necessarily true that the rich are more worldly than the poor ; they may have only a different way of manifesting the same spirit.

Nor should it be hastily assumed, as is often done, that there are great differences of thought and feeling between class and class. The notion arises in part from want of association with various classes, and in part from an original want of power of realizing the brotherhood of man ; of knowing by intuition that the likenesses between men as men must be strong enough to override the superficial differences created by variety of circumstances. This original error or defect is often corrected by wide experience of all classes of men, but it is not always due to the want of it. We start with a misconception, because the spirit of the world is stronger in us than the Spirit of God. And from this mistake arises one

of the most wide-spread of all the manifestations of the spirit of the world, viz. the dislike of whole classes for one another ; not only the separation between rich and poor, between employers and employed ; but the ill-feeling between what may be called the vertical, no less than between the horizontal strata of society ; the dislike of the gay by the serious ; of the serious by the gay ; of the worldly by the religious ; of the religious by the worldly ; though of course it ought to be impossible for a man who was really religious either to dislike or be disliked by any one who was not absolutely wicked, and hated goodness for its own sake. If we add to these all the dislikes that arise from difference of temperament, interest, opinion, and habit ; harsh social verdicts on social mistakes ; the mutual contempt of the cultivated and the uncultivated, the energetic and the easy-going ; not to mention the wide gulf of distrust and dislike in some countries between the laity and the clergy ; the spirit of the world will seem to be everywhere and the Spirit of God nowhere.

But it is the very fact of worldliness being a temper that throws men off their guard. The world being visible and material, it is easy and natural to come to the conclusion that its spirit clothes itself in matter too, and that objects which gratify the lust of the eye and the pride of life are its only drapery. When it is realized that it is a state of feeling which need spring from nothing that can be seen or felt, and can express itself without any of these forms, then its

universality is more recognized and more dreaded. So far from it being true that worldliness finds its expression only in luxury, or pleasure, or display, it is often manifested by censorious condemnation of pleasures we have no taste for, or an expenditure beyond our means.

For there are few subjects in which the world more clearly shows its spirit than in its treatment of pleasures. They are allowed or condemned by a purely artificial standard. It would be too much to say that their usefulness or harmfulness has nothing to do with the verdict, but it is certainly not the only consideration of weight with those who approve or denounce them. Certain pleasures, innocent in themselves, are often called wrong, or wrong for certain persons. If they produce no bad effect on the spirit of a man, they are wrong for nobody; if they do, they are wrong for all. There can be no question of the lawfulness of indulging in them at all if they are wrong; degree in that case does not enter into the question. And in the case of innocent pleasures the only question is one of degree; they are lawful for those who can afford them, so far and only so far as character is not deteriorated by them and work not neglected for them; so long as they neither cause duty to be left undone, nor make men disinclined for duty afterwards. There can be no classes of persons to whom pleasures innocent for others are unlawful, if they choose to partake of them to such extent as their means and duties permit. But the world-spirit

judges otherwise, and its judgment about pleasures, notably in the case of the clergy, is a conspicuous instance of its true character. It is thought that this and that pleasure is wrong for the clergy, not in degree, but absolutely; not because it interferes with their work, or because they cannot afford it, but because they are clergymen—though it is perfectly innocent for other people. Are the laity so different from the clergy that they can come spotless through experiences which stain their pastors?

This has gone so far that there are said to be States in America where a minister of religion dare not have a bottle of wine in his house. And the same spirit, differently manifested, is visible in England. There is a desire to exact a higher degree of holiness from others than we profess ourselves; and this desire is generally in exact proportion to the absence of strictness in the lives of those who are most exacting about the lives of others. The clergy can see this, and do see that in the favourite watering-places, for instance, and in the most fashionable quarters of London, public opinion as to how the clergy ought to live is most rigid, artificial, and imperious; and this is only one more manifestation of the many illustrations of the spirit of the world. To suspect and dread the presence of this spirit everywhere, most of all in our own hearts, may help us to pass gentler judgments on our neighbours; to think less of appearance and more of reality; to believe more in the great common features of humanity, and to have less regard for

superficial distinctions ; to remember that good nature may be frivolous, and conscientiousness hard ; that if society is hollow, solitude may be selfish ; to be more afraid of our good opinion of ourselves than we are of the bad word of our neighbours ; and to remember always and everywhere that we are spirits only to be harmed by what can influence spirit ; only to be helped, strengthened, purified, and softened by conscious communion with the Divine Spirit, whose most constant miracle of love on earth was to expel from suffering men the spirits of evil. A parable no less than a miracle for us.

RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT.

ST. MATT. xi. 12.—“ *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*”

THIS is part of a rather mournful comment made by Christ upon the men of His own age. He discusses it, as a man now might make a speech or write an article on the religious tendencies of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

His conclusion about the leading men among his contemporaries is not altogether satisfactory. He characterizes their eagerness to hear the Baptist in an unmistakable manner when he says, “What went ye out into the wilderness for to see?”

They were chiefly concerned, he implies, with the external features of the man. Was he supple and pliant enough to bend to their will? Was he likely to be a courtier to any party—National, Herodian, or Roman? Was he possibly another prophet of the old Hebrew type—one more flicker of the dying embers of the flame that once had burnt so brightly? Did they in the least perceive his true greatness, or understand that his real inspiration was seen not so much when his presence and his voice drew a whole

province after him, as when he said, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest Thou to me?" Did they know that it was greater to desire to be baptized by Christ, than to baptize Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the country about Jordan, even though the Messiah were among them? Did they see that John the saint was greater than John the preacher? Did they see that even as the least in the kingdom of heaven, he was greater than he could have been on the highest pinnacle of popular favour, if he had been unable to see the Divine nature under the lowly form of the Prophet of Nazareth?

For a long time the Jews of the middle and lower classes had been ready to follow any one who seemed to give the faintest promise of being a popular leader; this tendency was always bringing them into collision with their Roman masters. It was so before Christ came, and it led to their ruin afterwards. But their devotion to John took a higher form: if they did not fully understand him, they yet perceived that he was a preacher of righteousness; he inspired them with a lively interest in their own salvation, and with a fear of the future. They went out to hear his message; and they asked him, "What shall we do?" as if he knew and they were prepared to obey.

He made some impression on them, but it passed off; the crowded audiences and the eager attention did not fulfil their promise. Neither the preaching of John nor of Christ could regenerate their own people,

as we know from history ; as the Saviour Himself confesses, they were "like children sitting in the market," calling to one teacher to "dance when they piped," to another to "mourn when they wept ;" to be like them, to live their lives, speak their words, do their will ; and because they would not, departing and walking no more with them. If the crowds that followed John, and that wanted to make Christ a king, had "brought forth fruits worthy of repentance," He would not have been seen, in the last week of His life, "beholding the city and weeping over it."

But still our Saviour says that all through His public ministry there had been this eager interest about the kingdom of heaven. Men had been taught that there was a good to gain, or that there was an evil to avoid, and they had been eager to secure the one and escape the other by some means.

They seem to have thought of it as a sort of fortress to be carried by a *coup de main*, or to be entered by a postern-door, if they had the secret ; and they hurried with anxious curiosity to any one they thought could help them. It was an epoch of religious excitement, as there are periods of religious apathy, and it presented the usual features of such an epoch. It was a phase of emotion which met with no encouragement from the preaching of John, but was reprovèd and corrected by him. It was as opposed as it well could be to the teaching of Christ, who told the men of His generation that the kingdom of heaven was within them, where it would germinate like a seed or

ferment like leaven; who rebuked His two disciples for thinking about the rewards of the world to come when there was a life to lead and work to do on earth. It is very significant that immediately after saying that men are taking the kingdom of heaven by force, He should upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done because of their unbelief, as if unbelief were quite compatible with the desire to take the kingdom of heaven by force. He seems to have looked with anything but approval on the kingdom of heaven suffering violence; and to have regarded it as by no means the same thing as believing on Him. All the rest of His speech is full of sad hints of the mistake of those who thought that what they were seeking was the kingdom of heaven, and that theirs was the way to win it. He thanks His Father for revealing the true secret to babes; He says no man knoweth the Father save He to whom the Son reveals Him; He bids not the violent, but "the weary and the heavy laden," to "come unto Him for rest."

No doubt the same features characterize all such periods as marked this one; and it would be a good test of their Christian character to note how they would stand being tried by such a comment as Christ made upon the religious movement of His own time. What he appears to condemn is a kind of selfish haste and cowardly anxiety to secure whatever advantages may be gained from religion, without a corresponding desire to elevate the affections, to

regulate the desires, to purify the thoughts ; in a word, without any desire to set up the kingdom within first before seeking it without. Judged by such a standard as this, of how many religious movements that the world has seen would He not say, " The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force " ?

Such a movement seems to be passing over Europe now ; there is hardly any country in which religious questions are not prominent, though in several places they are taking a political and not a personal form. In our own country the political is at present subordinate to the personal interest, though both are active ; and it is said by some persons that it is only to be expected, after a period of successful devotion to commerce such as society has recently passed through—* when the prudence and energy of men have been rewarded by an unexampled increase of wealth—that there should be a religious reaction, and that men should think that there are other affairs to attend to and other interests to consult. If this is a true account of the matter, we might expect to see the same desire to secure profit and escape loss ; the same belief in energy and foresight, and in an investment producing a return in the affairs of the other world as in those of the present life. Of course, men who are immersed in business and have acquired an ineradicable habit of weighing the value of any scheme by one invariable test (and without such men there

* Preached in 1875.

would be no material progress in nations), and are at the same time without that higher cultivation of character which Christianity in its best sense can give, are likely when their thoughts are strongly turned to religion, to bring to bear upon it the habits of mind in which long experience has made them trust, which long exercise has made inseparable from their thoughts. They are apt, as the saying is, to take "a profit and loss view" of Christianity; to regard it as a system from which some advantage is to be expected in return for some obligations accepted and some pleasures renounced; to value it not for the character that it will develop within them, and the capacity for feeling the highest enjoyments which it will create, but for some results which are only the consequences of these—for support in the hour of death, for salvation in the world to come. It is a temptation very near to every one, whatever his work or character, because it appeals to the universal motive of fear, and not to the motive of the New Testament; and it would probably be found to be at the root of many of the more energetic religious movements in our own country.

It cannot be denied that religious excitement may be a turning-point in a man's life, and that fear may be the motive to him for doing what he ought to do, and leaving undone what never should have been done; but fear can have no part in the slow process of building up a character like the one revealed in Christ, which is the only notion we can have of heaven. It may be

a turning-point, no doubt; but the question is, from what? and to what? Of course it is a gain to society that men should leave off distinctly wicked ways; but it is not a satisfactory result of what is often called conversion that a man should be only turned from selfish concern about the affairs of this life to selfish concern about the affairs of another. We are called by the name of a Master—Christians—and the very token of discipleship is a confidence which should make us ready to leave our fate in His hands; content that He should do as He thinks best with and for us; happy in finding salvation from the temptations which beset us here in a distant imitation of His life. But to come to Him, as we are sometimes exhorted to do, not for the purpose of following Him, but to “ask what shall we have therefore?” not because we love Him, but because we dread God, this would be trying to take “the kingdom of heaven by force,” and it might show us, by its effect on our own lives, how far we are from it.

As a rule men do not know, except in their own cases, the results of such appeals to the feelings; but unless they are supported by regular training of motive and conduct afterwards, it is difficult to believe that they can have much effect for good. It is a familiar saying, that after excitement comes reaction—a distaste that is for the exciting cause, and a weakened power of effort in the direction of the excitement. This is a very serious result in such an important matter to every one as personal cha-

racter ; for personal character is Christianity, and it is a great loss to find ourselves less capable of response to appeals to higher motives because our sensibility has been worn out by incessant playing upon the lower. It is never wise or safe to appeal to transient feelings when there are persistent emotions to act upon ; and the feeling of fear is not only in its nature transient, but is the lowest and the poorest motive to action. Little good could be hoped from it, if the appeal succeeded ; if it fails, as is most likely—for it is of all impressions the one most quick to fade, with the circumstances which produced it—what is left but a weakened dread of that which was the only restraining motive before, and a weakened susceptibility to any higher appeals ? It is impossible for those who feel the difficulty of Christian life ; its varied and infinite demands ; the modes and the motives by which it is sustained, not to criticise attempts which are made to convert a population on a sudden, and on a large scale. They have experience themselves of the results of appeals to the feelings, and they cannot but look on with some anxiety when great crowds are warned “ to flee from the wrath to come ; ” to come to Christ to save them from it ; to make their peace with Him before they go about their business again. It is not so easy to annihilate past history as to become new men and women by the religious experience of a few moments ; nor can it be expected that a life begun with so little change will be very different from the one which preceded it ; that an impulse so sudden

and arising from such a motive will be permanent. The sympathy of large numbers is exciting enough, but when there are added to this, threats of the world to come, and agonizing descriptions of our Lord's physical sufferings, and promises of happiness after death in return for some mystic apprehension of their effects, a state of feeling is produced which may be very potent for good, but which seems to need the wisest teaching and control to save it from resulting in disappointment.

We are not as a nation very susceptible of religious impressions, but certain classes among us, when we are moved at all, are generally influenced by those that have been referred to. Such preaching is almost always sure to collect large crowds and to move them strongly; but it has not often happened that the attempt has been made on a larger scale than now.* It is impossible not to regret that more advantage is not taken of such an opportunity for Christian teaching; for showing the bearing of the words of Christ on the details of life, and how His Spirit should inform it; for pointing out the characteristic faults of classes; for speaking home to the conscience about faults that have grown inveterate by long toleration; about tempers that have become masterful by long indulgence. The sympathy of numbers would be as powerful to send such reproaches like an electric current through the crowd, as it is to transmit other

* Messrs. Moody and Sankey were preaching in England this year.

appeals. Surely the picture of the Perfect Man; of the fatherly care of God, with its constraining motive to live as sons of such a Father; the appeal to what is Divine in every man, if he would only let it appear, and live up to the level of his true nature; surely such appeals to the higher emotions (which we make when we want to cultivate the nature of a child), though they might not produce the turbulent reactions of fear or religious excitement, would raise men to a higher platform, and set a motive before them which would be at once elevated and enduring. Such ideas, when they once enter into the mind, take root there; they are a constant reproach to an unworthy life, and a persistent power of raising it. There is no reaction from their stimulus, but an abiding strength from their contact. Their claims upon allegiance and enthusiasm are not satisfied by a "decision once for all for Christ;" by any professions of conversion; but remain always exacting, exalting, and inspiring; at once an aim, a guide, and a power; pointing the perpetual contrast between what we are and what we are meant to be.

All are not of course attracted, or led, or misled, by religious appeals to the feelings of this sort; but some perhaps by others, and some may find it very hard to be impressed at all. The lesson of a religious movement is lost on those who only thank God that they are not like these poor fanatics, as they may think, but have a purer faith and a more elevating ritual; and on those also who, claiming to be Christians, are

rather pleased to be callous to all addresses to affections as well as to feelings. It is as easy to mistake one kind of excitement for religion as another. Art and taste will not save it from being as evanescent as the emotion of the crowd, even though it be more refined. Nor can we afford to disparage the crudeness or the hollowness of the religious experience of others, if loftier ideas will not stir our own hearts to action; if we can praise and pray without finding that any higher motives regulate our conduct. It is the presence of these motives which Christianizes society; and their importance and their force is that they are permanent sources of conduct based on the true ideals of God and of man. Once set up as a standard, they will be found in times of temptation a rebuke to unworthiness; and in the hour of pleasure an antidote to excitement. Men cannot have the strength of these motives when it is needed, and be free from their restraint when they are a burden.

Hearts in which Christ would say that His kingdom could not be found, will always be liable to seizures of panic or of hope—as long as any religious feeling remains in them—which will suggest some machinery of magic or self-delusion for “taking it by force.”

THE MEANING OF LIMITATIONS.

GAL. v. 17.—“ *Ye cannot do the things that ye would.*”

LIKE most great sayings, this consists of few words and short ones, but it carries a wide meaning. It lives because it embodies the experience of human life, and it would be hard to express it more concisely. And it is a conclusion about a great subject, for it sums up in a short sentence the mortal condition of men: “They cannot do the things that they would.” And the reason is that human nature is not single, but twofold; compounded of two opposing forces, set against each other, the desires of each directed against the other. This is St. Paul’s account of us. It seems a natural result, until one gets the mastery, that we never should do the things that we would; that we should at least not do them with that freedom of the will which is necessary to the idea of liberty of action. The restraint is common to both; the animal part of a man is in most cases controlled to some extent by the spirit of the man; hardly any one’s fleshly desires have uncontrolled liberty; the animal impulse to sleep, food, or any indulgence is rarely followed always and

unresisting. The flesh cannot do the things that it would, exactly as if there were no spirit. Man has not the liberty in this respect of the lower animals. He is checked, balked, rebuked, reproached; even his animal nature is imperfect in this respect, that it cannot obey its instincts. It is true to his whole condition in being limited, and unable fully to express itself. It is of course true that many men follow to a great extent the lead of appetite; but it is probable that those who are least conscious of any resistance to it are quite unaware how constant is the resistance that is maintained; how seldom it is true of any one that the flesh can and does invariably the things that it would. The conscious resistance of the spirit to the impulses of the flesh (under which St. Paul includes a good many more sins than those of appetite; things as aloof from appetite as envy and party spirit) is a standing hint of destiny, an indication of call and of final cause as clear as the voice of Revelation, and as strong as the instinct of immortality. It is something to be thankful for that we cannot do the things that we would; that there is that within us which will protest and be heard.

But the hindrance is mutual. The spirit cannot, any more than the flesh, do the things that it would. And it is like the flesh in this respect, that it cannot carry out its own desires by reason of the antagonism of the other part. It seems hard that, besides all the hindrances of external nature and of society, men should be so constituted as to carry about with them

always a standing difficulty to doing what they know to be right. It is so characteristic of man to have these high thoughts and holy wishes, that there seems a kind of hardship in the inevitable obstacle. It seems so creditable to feel such aspirations, and so desirable to fulfil them, that it looks like the caprice of power that the check should be as ever-present as the desire; the stoppage as invariable as the attempt to escape out of prison in some direction into freedom and action. But it is a matter of unchanging experience.

The difficulty of personal reformation, of the practice of any particular virtue—like gentleness of speech, for instance—the struggle against unsatisfactory or questionable habits, the control of temper or self-indulgence—all these are so hard that their difficulty is proverbial; and it is not occasioned by obstacles without, but by resistance within. Men see clearly enough the beauty of what are called the fruits of the Spirit; there is no want of taste for them, and no external hindrances to their acquisition. The reason why so few aspirations are gratified and so few attempts successful, is the obstacle which is set against them in the same nature that feels the longing and makes the struggle upwards. “A man’s foes are they of his own household.” It is this that makes human life the problem and the trial that it is. Hard to account for, hard to deal with, hard to analyze, hard to make the best of as a matter of fact. This nature—in which the lower part cannot have its way unresisted and unrebuked; in which the higher finds itself thwarted and

crippled by the strength or the weakness of the lower ; in which man has wisdom enough to see the riddle and not wisdom enough to unravel it—this nature, “darkly wise, and rudely great,” is what we find to be our own, without hope of escape or of radical change.

This would be a depressing view of life if there were no hope except in complete transformation ; but the degrees in which what is best and what is worst in men have their way are infinitely various, and they mark the differences between characters. There is always hope of some victory over evil, even if a small one ; there is always hope of an onward step in purity of thought, in some cleansing or strengthening of the sanctuary within (which is the citadel of Christianity) ; there is always hope enough of rising, horror enough of falling below even the present mark, to serve for daily motives ; and “one step is enough for me ; lead Thou me on,” for “I cannot do the things that I would.” Love and zeal and faith look down long vistas, or on to shining heights, but they do not see the hindrances because they rise on a sudden in their path ; the pilgrim carries them with him in his progress. Some master some difficulties, none all ; some yield to most of them ; some master most ; but the more that are mastered the higher rise the aims ; the more that stop us, the fewer we do of the things that we would.

Under all conditions of spiritual life and of moral effort, the description of the Apostle holds true as a picture of the inner life of man. And it is no less true of his outer life. Consider the physical limitations

of an animal body such as ours; even as a parable of our social and spiritual bounds they are worth a thought. We find ourselves on a planet which, small as it is, is vastly too big for our unassisted powers of movement; on a surface from which we cannot, unaided, rise much more than a yard; surrounded by an ocean which we cannot traverse without artificial help; hindered by laws of nature, as we call them, from freedom of action; seeing ourselves outdone in merely physical powers by the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, the fishes of the sea, while we are the lords of the animal creation. The attempts which men have made at various times to overcome these inabilities look like a parable of that opposition to human will that seems to be the token and the essence of our present state. A man can no more be rich or wise by wishing, than he can be as swift as a swallow or as strong as a lion. There is not only the infirmity within—the entire incapacity perhaps for being what he wishes, as well as the want of moral fibre to carry out the intimations of mind—but there is the want of chance; the want of friends; the want of means; perhaps the want of length of days. All these may be wanting, when there is both the power to design and the resolution to work; and when such a case occurs, it is as true a token of an imperfect state as the unaccomplished desires of the spirit by reason of the opposition of the flesh.

Almost all men who are worth anything begin life with high aims. They will achieve something; they

will not be as other men are; they will not follow the multitude in folly or vice. And it is well that it should be so, for they need the impetus of this enthusiasm to start in life; but such feelings are corrected by experience. It is soon found out how few things can be accomplished in a lifetime; how few aims achieved; how few ideals made real. It is well when the bitter lesson is not learnt from this experience, that since so little can be accomplished, it is not worth struggling for the little that is attainable. The truer lesson that life teaches is of the need to work on. Since time is short and circumstances hard, to try harder; to make sure, at least, of leaving something behind when the battle is done. But with all the enthusiasm of youth and with all the belief in striving that the experience of life may bring, life as a whole must present itself as a condition in which, whether from opposition from within or from without; from want of help, time, or opportunity, we cannot do the things that we would. Man is made up of high thoughts and low desires; of great aims and small means; of grand ideas and poor results. He has visions of work that he will do, which he never does; hopes for himself that are never fulfilled; intentions of being what he never is. He feels within himself a capacity for tasks that he is never set to perform; of wielding an influence for which he never has the opportunity; of diffusing good that he never has the courage or self-denial to undertake. These thoughts and longings are the offspring of that within

us which is nobler than what we see without ; but they die beneath its weight. Children from beyond the world, they come to us as hopes and plans ; but they perish almost at birth, overlaid by the nature that bore them, or crushed by the conditions of the visible world into which they are born, and are reckoned among the things that we would but cannot.

It is this condition of incapacity which constitutes the true mortality of men. It is not merely that after a certain number of years they must change their state ; must go away and be seen no more. If life had been fruitful successful and progressive within and without, the signature of death would not be so broadly written upon it as it is. It would be life, and full life, while it lasted, if ever so short. There would be none of that feeling of imprisonment and failure about it which arises from finding that we cannot be the kind of persons, nor do the kind of things that we would. St. Paul speaks of the flesh in his own case and its opposition to his higher nature, as of the cumbrous weight of a dead body tied to a living man : " Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? " meaning, from this dead body. As if he was not only encumbered with a load which barred all free action, but fainting in an atmosphere of death that was fatal to effort and to aim.

These limitations that hinder all attempts to achieve or to be, when their effect is as decided as their tendency, make our present state our true death ; and if they have any significance, they point to what we

call death as our deliverance. They all point forward that is, and contain within themselves a presumption of immortality ; for they seem to show that man was meant for a state into which he has not been born. Consciousness of a capacity for work which we never have a chance of doing ; visions of a holiness we never reach ; fitness for associations we never experience ; feelings that we cannot express and coming to us from we know not whence ; struggles that end in failure ; strivings that end in relapse ; love that is never returned ; and energy that beats the air,—these are hints not only of a life after death, but of a life in which the contrast between power and performance, between the ideal and the real, shall not be so broadly marked as it is here. Otherwise the second part of man's life would oppress him with the same sense of ineffectualness and failure that the first does.

It may be that they point to more than this ; that they point to a life of energy, where to try is to succeed ; where the resisting medium which walls up both effort and feeling here will exist no more ; but where free scope and perfect companionship may develop powers and feelings that have long beaten in vain against their barriers. This is the kind of immortality that we are destined to, if we may trust the suggestions of our own nature—a change from “cannot” to “can,” from less life to more ; or else death would be no deliverance, but only another name for a fresh lease of bondage. It needs the thought of such a possible career to inspire men under the burden of the

sense of failure which a contemplation of their present life suggests.

Few thoughts could be more inspiriting than this to all those to whom life appears as only another name for vigour of action and freshness of feeling. For to them the difficulty of living, the struggle of, not for, existence, is a bracing atmosphere to fit them for a purer air and for intenser efforts; the hardships are steps to mount higher upon; the failures corrections of mistaken endeavours; the consciousness of power an encouragement to work on; the vision of holiness a promise of communion with the Holy One. It may be then that the general sense of difficulty and of resistance in life is meant to suggest another career, since we find from experience that there are characters which it strengthens to bear their part in this one. It may help some to bear the disappointment of obscure work or humble station, when they feel capable of higher things, to remember that this contrast between feeling and condition may be both a hint and a preparation for a higher state. It may cheer some under the mortification of making no progress in spiritual life; of winning no love; of accomplishing nothing; to feel that these disappointments are, rightly understood, almost a promise of changed conditions hereafter, and so ought to be a strength in overcoming the temptation to a bitterness which may be excusable here, but can find no plea for existence in a condition of ideal surroundings. And to all the tendency of such thoughts must be to

make them regard this life more as a stage in a great design, whose seeming imperfection constitutes its very fitness as a preparation for the stage to come ; and so to increase their sense of its importance ; even of the importance of the small efforts and the small failures, the good resolutions and the poor results that make up each day's history.

THE BIBLE.

2 COR. iii. 6.—“ *The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*”

It is easy to pass over unnoticed even a caution so important and so singular as this. It is contained in the most sacred portion of our Sacred Book, and in one of the most undoubtedly genuine writings of this portion. St. Paul is, as usual, undervaluing himself and magnifying his office. All the qualification he has, so he says, to be a minister of the Gospel is from God. He it is who has qualified him to be a minister of the new covenant; “not of the letter, but of the spirit” of it, for “the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.” It is worth while to note the context, because the same Divine authority which is his commission to teach is implied as sanctioning his distinction between the spirit and the letter, and his verdict about them. It is not about the varied contents of the older Scriptures alone that he makes this assertion. Their mingled elements of record and revelation might seem to justify it; but about that part of the Scripture which is more especially spiritual, the truths he was teaching and the words he

was writing, he says, "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life."

There is probably no other book in the world in which such a caution exists against misunderstanding its purpose and use; which contains, so to speak, such a protest against its own literal infallibility. Great men have written great books, and after careful revision have published them in the full belief not only of the truth of their general views, but of the accuracy of individual statements. But they have inserted no caution against everything they have said being taken literally; no appeal from the letter to the spirit of what they have written. In spite of the absence of any such caution, mistakes have been found in the greatest books; no one therefore questions their general truth and value. One reason, though not the chief one, why St. Paul thought such a protest necessary, may have been that our Sacred Book is the product of many minds. Thus, though there was a unity of spirit, there was a diversity of intelligence in the various writers; and it was this spirit in which all agreed that was to be sought and preached, and not the divergences in which it was expressed.

But he goes beyond this, not only in this place but in others. He warns his converts against being bound by the letter of the law, which is the shadow, but the substance is of Christ; against being subject to ordinances, which "perish with the using." The law, he says, gives sin its power over the conscience;

and much in the same spirit in which he asserts the slavery of a religion of mere obedience to precepts, he says here, "The letter killeth." If we consider for a minute what death and life mean in the Bible, it will be more easy to understand him. They answer to bondage and freedom; to fear of error and seeking after truth; to dread of doing wrong and to aiming at perfection; to despair and to hope; to isolation and to love; to fear and to faith; to sloth and to energy. They are spiritual conditions of a being whose nature responds quickly and truly to every influence. And to him the Apostle says the influence of the letter of the New Testament is death, and of the spirit, life.

We should hardly have accepted this judgment from any one but an Apostle; but since the greatest of the Apostles has said it, it must be worth while to consider how it is true, and if possible to find some instances in which it has proved to be. And the spiritual meaning of life and death is the key to his declaration. The common phrase of "being bound by the letter" of a document is tacit evidence of the effect of the letter upon the will. There is a duty to obey or to accept it, but there is no stimulus to the will, and no enlightenment of the conscience from the obedience or the faith to which we are bound. A prohibition or a proposition may impress men with the fear of error in faith or practice, but cannot inspire them with trust in a living person, or possess them with the passion of imitating his perfections. "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" do or believe this or

that, may make men despair and hang down their hands; they never can give them hope or energy to go on. We feel, without thought about it, that such words as "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark"—that such words were born, not of the letter, but of a spirit which could quicken a man so to conceive his life and so to live it.

Besides this paralysis of the energies and of the will, to cling to the letter, to be blind and deaf to the spirit which breathes and burns all through our sacred books, produces another characteristic of death, viz. separation. It is the cause and the token of death to everything created, from the unconscious life of the plant to the mind and heart of man, which depend upon association for their life. And the creature's first instinct about the Uncreated is that He is such as His creatures are—desiring children as the objects of His love, and as so much feeling the need of it, that He even commands them to love Him in return.

But what is and has been the effect of the letter on the way that men have regarded one another? The whole preaching of Christ is a protest against that literal interpretation of the Bible, and that blindness to the spirit of it, which were killing his fellow-countrymen. They were so hidebound in their law as to think that death, and not life, were outside it; as to hate all who were without; as to be hated by all for their inhuman exclusiveness. Even to the great mind of St. Paul it was a mystery, *i.e.* a secret revealed from

heaven, to his surprise and joy, that to the Gentiles also was opened the kingdom of heaven. He was not the first Jew that saw this: the great prophet of the captivity was also quickened by the same spirit of revelation. But the Jews could see nothing in all he told them but the turn of fortune in their favour, and the glory and greatness of Zion. They were more in bondage to the letter after the captivity than before; and the Gospels tell us how little all the contact they had had with Greece, with Rome, with Alexandria, had widened their minds or opened their hearts.

While they were saying, "This people which knoweth not the law is cursed," One came who said, "Blessed be ye poor" (though ye know not the law), "for yours is the kingdom of heaven;" and when "the common people heard Him gladly"—when He taught them not as the scribes, but with a spirit that gave a strange new life to imprisoned hearts,—then the letter killed Him; "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die." The spirit which moved some of the best of them to sympathy with His Divine nature was silenced, and the letter closed their hearts. It killed Christ, after it had first killed His murderers. The influence of the Spirit, on the other hand, is seen in the enthusiasm of the day of Pentecost, and of the early days of the Christian Church. These are not the only instances of the effect of the bondage of the letter and of the freedom of the Spirit in the history of our religion. The contrast is for ever presenting itself, not only in individual life, where the letter

blinds the understanding to truth and shuts the heart against neighbours, while the Spirit gives light and warmth, but it is seen more broadly in the divisions of Christendom. It might have been thought that "the unity of the Spirit" which animates the followers of Christ would have kept them in the "bond of peace;" but the isolation of the letter has been too strong for the comprehension of the Spirit. It is of course a truism that if we were ruled by the Spirit of God there would be no divisions among us; but it is worth remembering that it is of this Spirit especially which makes for unity that we are subjects and ministers; while we refuse to be led by the spirit of revelation, and turn again to the "weak and beggarly elements" of the letter, to which we prefer to be in bondage; with what results to ourselves and to the Church of Christ those who look within and without know best.

The history of most of the great ecclesiastical controversies would illustrate the opposite effects of being led by the spirit of Scripture and being in bondage to the letter of it. How the fine impalpable spirit of a truth may escape from those who are battling for the letter; how men become dead to the substance while they are contending for the form, may be seen in most of them, but nowhere perhaps more disastrously than in the great dispute about that which was meant to be "the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace" of unity. "This is My body." It is enough to make angels weep to see men analyzing

a sentence like this, with untold spiritual loss to themselves whichever way they conclude. What no one can doubt is the spirit in which the elements were given and the spirit in which they ought to be taken, if we, through them, are all to be one; if they are to be to us "meat indeed and drink indeed." It would be well if we could all apply the impressive teaching of this great division to many and minor ones. It throws such a broad light on the contrast between the letter and the spirit of the Bible (which is the spirit of the Word, that is of Christ) that there is no need to quote other cases; only to learn from this one the deadening effects on men's hearts, and the separation from hearts they were meant to be at one with, that may result from a rigid adherence to the letter without being penetrated by the spirit of Holy Scripture.

If we are able to observe such effects as these, what is the temptation to this idolatry of the text of Scripture?

It seems to proceed largely from a mistaken view of what religion is; from looking at it solely as an objective and historical system without regard to what is internal and subjective—as something which can be taken up and laid down, professed and practised, rather than as a permanent state of mind and feeling with regard to invisible Persons and invisible realities.

For religion, viewed as an external historical system, demands an infallible external guide, and this leads to the preference of bondage with certainty to

freedom without it; without certainty that is in details, for no Christian has any doubt of the spirit of his Bible. But we have no promise of certainty, and no blessing is attached to it. "The kingdom of heaven," says the Word of the Father, "is like treasure hid in a field," and must be sought diligently till it is found. We must search the Scriptures not like the Pharisees, for texts to be used as missiles against opponents, or as props to our own views, but because "they are they which testify of" Christ. It is possible for us, as it was for them, not to find Him there. Uncertainty is the very condition of our existence here, and it seems the especial Nemesis of all views that they must necessarily be uncertain. But the Nemesis may be a blessing in disguise, for certainty about them would be that death of the letter which we are told to dread.

Again, men cling to the letter because they love to be ruled; they hate the responsibility of having to judge for themselves, and the trouble of deriving rules of conduct from principles of life.

Rules are comparatively easy to carry out. Principles are hard to master and to apply. A religion of formularies and of obedience might have the same deadening effect upon us that the moral maxims of Confucius (without an ideal to inspire them) have had upon the Chinese; but we prefer the simplicity and certainty of it to the search after truth, and the endless effort and the seemingly hopeless command to "be perfect."

Our Lord gives us no encouragement to live by the letter. He, contrasting the spirit with the flesh, as St. Paul contrasts it with the letter (a suggestive parallel), says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth." As if to warn men against making any external system founded on His teaching the whole of their religion, He says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." As if to caution them against expecting definiteness, He is repeatedly saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." He that can penetrate into the spirit of My teaching, let him live by it.

No teacher ever lived whose teaching so much demanded that his followers should be possessed with the spirit of their master. The letter of many even of His sayings would kill just in proportion as their spirit gives life. "This is a hard saying," his disciples said once ; and ever since His friends have been fain to pass over some of His sayings with a sigh as hopeless, and His enemies to cast others in the teeth of His followers as impossible, because neither friends nor foes have entered into the spirit which animated the life that found expression in them.

For the Bible is not the only inspired creation of the Father. Man is inspired too, and the Holy Spirit is infused into him, and God is revealed in him, that he may find in all God's other revelations of Himself, especially in the revealed Word, "a correspondent for every movement towards the better which is felt in his own heart." * It must not be thought that it is

* Coleridge's "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit."

easy to find the spirit that underlies the letter ; it requires thought and longing to learn, and above all, a life to match, which will grow by what it feeds upon. "But even in the life that least consists with it, if there be the desire after God, there will be answering grace ready to enter in."

"The Bible," says Coleridge, in the "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit," "is a spiritual world—spiritual, and yet at the same time outward and common to all. You in one place, I in another, all men somewhere or at some time meet with an assurance that the hopes and fears, the thoughts and yearnings, that proceed from or tend to a right spirit in us are not dreams, or voices heard in sleep, or spectres which the eye suffers but does not perceive. The hungry have found food, the thirsty a living spring, the feeble a staff, and the victorious warrior songs of welcome and strains of music ; and as long as each man asks what he wants, no man will discover aught deficient or amiss in the vast and many-chambered storehouse." "For more than a thousand years it has gone hand in hand with the moral and intellectual cultivation of man, always supporting, often leading the way. Its very presence as a believed book has rendered the nations emphatically a chosen race that have accepted it, and this too in exact proportion as it is more or less generally studied."

Such words from so great a teacher might well have been the last words of a sermon on the Bible, but he adds a caution and a comfort to those who are easily

shaken in their belief in the general spirit of their Book. "If a peerer or a scoffer detects here an ignorance or there a contradiction, here a seeming sanction of cruelty or of immorality, are we who are quickened by its spirit, and know by inner experience its effect upon life, are we to be frightened or lose faith in it, and not rather to ask, Is that, on the whole, the spirit of the Book?"

If that is what a man finds in it, instead of finding what finds him, he has not gone to it with the desire to be more like God or to know more of Him. Like all His gifts to us, it may be misunderstood, misused, abused; like them, we find in it what we bring to it. Men should not, therefore, be alarmed if those who are dead to the Spirit, who is the life of men, fail to hear Him speaking in its pages because here and there His utterances are blended with the notes of human infirmity, of human passion and of human pride; since the Divine is ever mingled with the human in all that men do and are; knowing, as they do, that the message of God to the souls of men is there; that there is a spirit breathing beneath and through the imperfections of the letter which is the "power of an endless life."

READING.

ROM. xv. 4.—*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”*

THIS would be a very suitable day * to observe as a day of thanksgiving for the spiritual harvest. It is the Sunday which is set apart for giving thanks for good books ; and it is possible that there is as much reason for being thankful for good books as for the fruits of the earth. Most likely men will continue to be influenced by books not only after the earth has ceased to bring forth fruits, but after it has ceased to exist. Unlike the fruits of the earth, they do not “perish with the using,” but gain new life with every use. Death is not the condition of wider life to them as it is to the seed, for they bring forth fruit without passing through the gate of death.

Use is their condition of life, as it is to the seed ; but it is a life that is not preceded by death nor followed by it ; nor is it bounded by the limits of time and space, but spreads and grows from every fresh root, leaving results that it is certain the world can-

* Second Sunday in Advent.

not exhaust, which perhaps can never be exhausted. The influence of good literature need not be dwelt upon; the marvel is that it enters so little into men's thoughts as a matter of thankfulness. It would be difficult to dilate upon the power it exercises and the blessings it confers without being commonplace; but probably it is not often consciously included in the catalogue of "all the blessings of this life" for which public thanks are offered up in our Liturgy; not perhaps because it may be among the blessings of another life too; but because it is too faintly felt to be a blessing of either. And good books are a blessing for which the world ought to be more and more thankful as it grows older. Every generation is the "heir of all the ages," and richer than its predecessor by the contribution of the last. The store accumulates as time goes on, and it is a store that increases instead of diminishing with consumption. There is no fear of population overtaking production in this harvest; for this is food of which the demand produces a new supply without lessening the old. The fear is not that the good seed should be consumed, but that the weeds and the chaff should be taken instead.

The Epistle and the Collect for this Sunday give two hints about reading which are as useful now as at the time they were written. Any hint about reading comes with especial force from St. Paul. His early training seems to have been in a wider literature than was common with his countrymen, and he had all the culture in their special learning of which the most

carefully educated of them could boast. But the spring of his life and the source of his inspiration are ordinarily regarded as being independent of book-learning; he is generally thought of as a man new-made at his conversion, and as so fully equipped with the revelation of Christ, as to need no other furniture for his mission; as to have dispensed with his previous acquirements; as to have gloried in knowing nothing but Jesus Christ. He is moreover often conceived as being thoroughly anti-Judaic in sentiment. However this may be, his evident independence of Jewish ideas; the completeness with which he was possessed with the idea of Christ; and his wide acquaintance with the thought, and perhaps with the literature, of other nations combine to give especial value to any recommendation of his to study the Hebrew Scriptures.

For it would be an affectation of liberality to suppose that St. Paul is referring to any but the Holy Scriptures when he speaks of what was written aforetime. Animated as he was by his special commission; by the assurance of the resurrection which was the food of his life; by the strange joy of the new revelation that the gospel and the redemption were meant for all mankind; in the glow of this excitement; in his exuberant sense of life in carrying this news about he is still mindful of the quiet delight and strength that come from reading. It is difficult to imagine him reading. Preaching, travelling, writing his earnest letters, working at his craft, conversing with his

friends—these occupations are the recorded features of his life ; but they scarcely seem to leave time for reading or calm to enjoy it, however much a life of such restless energy might seem to demand it as an antidote. But his whole life belies the notion that he preached what he did not practise ; and no man who did not love reading would have written with such discriminating appreciation of its characteristic advantages. No one who had not read good literature, and read it well, would have spoken of the patience and comfort that come from careful reading ; and the sentence is a suggestion of the way in which the intervals of the writer's busy life were passed. Many men since St. Paul wrote have found in the pages of a great book their only refuge from the sense of pain, or shame, or failure, or loss. Many as they read have stored the quiet strength of character which life demands for its higher work, and which the business of the world frets away.

He was speaking of course of the revelation of God in the older Scriptures, and he was writing at a period and to a city in which there was need of all the patience and comfort that the assurance of a loving Father and an eternal righteousness could give. He was writing to a people who had other literature ; both contemporary writings and that which was "written aforetime." He might not intend to limit their reading to the Hebrew Scriptures, as he set a different example himself ; but he probably saw that this was the advice most

suited for their time and circumstances ; as he might think that the caution to read above everything what was " written aforetime " might be most needful for a reader now.

For the contemporary literature of our day is immeasurably greater than it was then, and than it has ever been. The temptations to desultoriness are increased in proportion ; and waste of time, to say the least of it, is hard to be avoided. No better rule could be prescribed to one who wanted to know what to read than to begin with the great names. Every one knows the names of the great masters, and their books are translated into every language. How many of us who are curious about the last pamphlet, or the last article ; who are fretful if we do not receive our new books when we expect them, and think we must have missed something if we have not read the periodical belonging to the day, week, or month,—how many of us have read, even in translations, the great books which are the common heirlooms of the world ? And yet it might be thought that men would be glad of the assurance that the test of time gives to a book. Nothing is more common than to waste time over a book before it is discovered to be worthless. Not every one has the critical faculty to discern at once that a book is good for nothing. In consequence, men who are supposed to know what is worth reading are continually asked to recommend books. They might answer the inquirer with the question, Have you read all you do

know to be worth reading? Not to speak of the great names of all time, have you even read the good light literature that has received the stamp of the approval of one or two generations?

But this is not what is meant, for the most part, by the inquiry. A literature is sought and is provided now which reflects the excitement, the self-consciousness, and the imperfect education of the age; an age in which, with all its boast of culture, feeling has gone far ahead of education, and which demands in literature as in life its appropriate stimulants.

It is easy to see that books of this kind, even when the moral of them is wholesome, must have a bad effect upon character. They aggravate the evil that good reading tends to allay; they make only a faint demand upon the intellect, but appeal loudly to the passions; they do little to elevate the reader on to the serene and neutral plane of taste and art; of wide interests and human sympathies, but hurry him along through the mire of prejudice and passion, of conventional folly, and too conventional sin. For the especially conventional sin is the groundwork of a good many of the second and third rate popular novels.

No patience can come from such reading; only impatience of the prosaic conditions of life, and of the limits imposed by external control or by self-interest. No comfort can come from it; but only a growing incapacity to meet and bear inevitable trials, and to do the duties that lie nearest to our path.

There is of course much literature of our own day free from all such faults, and of the highest and purest kind ; but it is not accessible to all, and not every one has the means of knowing the good from the bad without experiment ; so that most readers will find that the Apostle's advice to read what was "written aforetime" is not a superannuated caution yet. As this delight in exciting narratives is the caricature of true sympathy, so there is a curiosity, as marked a feature of the time, which is the parody of the true spirit of inquiry. "The noblest study of mankind is man," but perhaps the meanest study of mankind is an inquisitiveness about the faults and follies of our neighbours. The "delight in merely personal talk," which is a permanent social vice, has now become a public craving, and papers exist to gratify it. They would be a sensible blot upon the character of the English press, if the cheaper and more widely read journals did not redeem its fame. These supply their millions of readers with that contemporary history which is as natural an interest, at least, as the history of any other epoch, and taken altogether they show a wholesome interest in public life among the masses of the English people, and an honourable sense in those who manage them of the legitimate office and limits of public writing. But, as every one knows, there is a class of newspapers, the growth of recent years, which is not cheap ; which do not appeal to the nation, but to a class ; whose staple commodity is not public news but private history ;

the gossip of a class for a class; they live by it. Journals could be named from which, if the columns of personal anecdote were cut out, would lose half their circulation at once. It is hard to imagine a greater dishonour to the press than such writing, or a more binding duty to literature than to discourage it. It would seem obvious, at all events, that no one can take a wide view of the Collect for this Sunday, and interpret it to mean a thanksgiving for all good books, and continue to encourage, by reading or by purchase, papers which strike at the root of all healthy literature, by destroying the taste for it; to say nothing of them as a social outrage.

The caution to read what was "written aforetime" is applicable to the broadsheet as well as to the volume; it would leave us the papers that have been accepted by the common approval of men; it would save us from the personal journals which are the product of the day.

If the Epistle gives a hint of the matter for reading, the Collect speaks plainly about the manner of it. "To read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" much of the literature of the hour would not only be misapplied labour, but it would be impossible; much of it does not supply matter for such a process. It would defeat its object to read it so; it is meant to be read fast; it does not aim at style; it does not convey information; it does not stimulate thought or self-questioning. There is no cultivation of interest, taste, or character to be found in these mere appeals to the

passions. But cultivation of some sort is the end of reading ; and a book cultivates exactly in proportion to its demand upon the reader for thought. A book which costs the reader no effort, which leaves behind no result, in fresh knowledge, in keener perceptions, in wider interests, in grace of character ; which makes nothing worth having ours which was not ours before, cannot be one of those for which we give thanks. We cannot digest what has no wholesome residuum to assimilate after all the innutritious parts have been rejected.

The education of English boys and girls is essentially an education in literature. They are taught to read at school, if they are taught nothing else. They are taught, that is, to see what is in a book and to get something out of it. But how very little this power is used ! With a few exceptions, there is a great falling off in passing from the studies of boyhood to the reading of youth. The manly taste in books which was cultivated in the boy deserts the man ; it is a sign of his emancipation that he can read what he likes, and he finds a literature to his hand which he can neither “ mark, learn, nor inwardly digest.” He takes to it without thought ; as if this practised facility of digesting a book had been acquired for nothing ; as if he thought it made little difference to his children what books were read by their parents, what tastes in books were encouraged or repressed in homes.

It is easy to conjecture the effect which the matter

and the manner of reading adopted by this generation may have upon the next. It will be somewhat the same, probably, with regard to social questions and social life, that the manner in which the Bible has usually been read has had upon religious opinion, and the attitude of Christians to one another.

It is too large a subject for the end of a sermon, but it is worth considering what effect the inward digestion of the Bible—systematic study of it as a whole, with the view of extracting its spirit—what effect this would have on partial views; on second-hand opinions; on burning questions of doctrine and ritual; on traditional interpretations; on the respective value of religion and godliness; on our relation with other Christian and non-Christian societies; on our estimate of the lawfulness of recognized habits of business and of society.

If it were even probable that by this “digestion” we might extract the true spirit of this Book which is the Spirit of God, it would be a worthy exercise of our acquired power of reading; it would vindicate the character of what was written aforetime; it would give a real instead of a formal value to these writings which we profess to reverence, but of which we really know little; it would interpret by its results the prayer of this day’s Collect; and, what is above all, it would place us on firm ground in our relations with God and man. It might not leave us perhaps so certain on some points as we are now; but this kind of certainty may not be very firm ground. It might leave us in doubt

about many things of which we are now convinced. It might demonstrate the impossibility of being convinced about them ; but it would leave behind a hope which is not to be derived from opinions, but which would be grounded on the uniform revelation of the purpose and the character of God, and a patience and comfort derived from the conviction that in strict conformity to this purpose and this character the way of salvation for the creature was to be found amid all differences of view and ceremony, in a life in harmony with the will of the Creator, and in growing likeness to His mind.

CULTURE AND SYMPATHY.

PREACHED AT MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE ON THE ANNI-
VERSARY OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHAPEL.
SEPTEMBER 29, 1877.

ST. MATT. xix. 20.—“ *The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?* ”

It can hardly be called a fanciful analogy to adopt as the modern representative of this young man one trained with the systematic teaching and the careful discipline of an English public school. He had received all that teachers could give him, and he felt a want that no learning could supply. The law had done all it could for him, and it left him craving for “life.”

It is fair, I think, to take the best view of his question, and to assume that it implied a higher longing than the mere wish for the happiness in another world which his wealth had secured to him in this.

He was experiencing a reaction from learning and a desire to put his knowledge to the test of practice; or he was eager for a wider sphere of usefulness; or

he felt that there were mysteries in the worlds around and above him on which the law shed no light, but which the new Teacher might reveal to him, and he came for the interpretation of his longings. Anyhow his question represents that impatience of pupilage, that craving after more room and more light which are the inevitable, perhaps the intentional, result of systematic training. To him the law had been in more than one sense "a schoolmaster to bring him to Christ," and the Saviour's answer was meant to be the cure for his restlessness and the satisfaction of his wants. The Son of Man introduces him to humanity as the object not only of his riches and of his education, but of himself.

He was young, rich, highly taught, and there was no worthier work for him; he was aspiring, and there was no higher aim. It was easier for him, I suppose, to approach Christ than the poor to whom he was told to give his wealth, but the result was the same. Men approach God and find themselves cast upon mankind as the one means of serving Him—or they begin with humanity and arrive at God. Men seem all to be gathered up into Christ and to issue again from Him as the sum-total and the source of us all, so that it is only by identifying ourselves with men that we can share the life of Christ. And this was, I suppose, the drift of His answer. Eternal life is the gift of God through the Divine Man; because it is to be achieved by living for mankind.

We know how the young man shrank from this

test. He had expected perhaps to combine the enjoyment of his wealth and station with the high companionship and mystic teaching of the new Prophet; and he was condemned to a life of toil, privation, and obscurity. He failed, we are told, because of his riches; but his education did not save him from failure. If the saying of the Pharisees "this people which knoweth not the law are cursed" is to be accepted as expressing the spirit of the education given to Jewish youths of the higher classes, it is easy to see why its exclusiveness would indispose a young man so trained to accept the view and the condition of eternal life proposed by Christ to this inquirer.

It is not difficult, as I said, to trace some analogy between his training and its result, and that of a young man of the same condition in England nowadays. No one can feel so keenly as teachers do the danger of a similar issue to their work. For the education of an English public school which rightly aims rather at condition of mind than breadth of knowledge; which instils into the mind a certain number of general principles and teaches to classify from a necessarily limited experience, produces the high result of intellects ready to attempt new subjects with practised ease; and tends to produce also the disposition to think that everything can be learnt in the same way the first knowledge came, and that there is nothing more to do except to learn of some new book or of some new teacher.

It is only by its highest products that an education

can be judged; and in some of these the best modern teaching seems to have left, as one of its results, a tendency to rest in learning; to make it, apart from its effect on character, or on the common good, a sufficient end; to look to it alone for growth and light, to divorce learning from working. My own experience would lead me to say, that among the more cultivated young men of the day the number of those who show any desire to carry out into practice what they have learnt is small as compared with those who are eager to sit at the feet of the latest philosopher and to discuss the newest possibility that has been hazarded. They go to every new teacher with the question "what lack I yet?" as if he had "the words of eternal life."

And side by side with this tendency may be seen another and less subtle tendency of the character of our studies, and of our mode of life. For our learning is for the most part the learning of a class—almost of a caste. It is the privilege of the upper or at least of the wealthier classes. It is a knowledge of subjects which as a rule do not interest, not merely the poor, but the large class which lies between ourselves and the poor. It tends therefore apart from counterpoise, to separate us at least in thought from the great majority of our fellow-men. It may narrow the sympathies it was designed to expand, and lower the aim it was meant to exalt. It may produce a feeling of pride in learning denied to others, rather than a sense of responsibility for the use of wider

knowledge, and for the loss of irrevocable opportunities of carrying it out into practice.

The peculiar character of academic life also is likely to have its effect in contracting sympathies. An academic society is made up of all similar elements ; it excludes one whole sex ; it excludes besides, the old, the very young, the feeble, and the poor. The variety of nature's grouping is not represented in it.* As a consequence it is rich in the virtues which are called forth by association with equals. "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control," are forced upon us by the pressure of our surroundings. Truthfulness, courage, and self-reliance are developed as a natural defence in such a society. We mix with those who are like us in most ways, who reflect our tastes, qualities, and judgments, so that it is not surprising that these should move in a narrow circle. We meet with comparatively few calls on our compassion, and few persons who want our help. Most of those about us have all that we have, and most are lacking in the qualities and experience of which we are empty. So that this want of more varied elements in academic life is another difficulty to be encountered, and another cause of the bounded sympathies which may be one of its results.

And to these two causes of isolation we have to add a third which from its important share in school-life demands mention. For school-games, valuable as many of their effects are, have become so costly

* Rev. James Martineau's "Endeavours after a Christian Life."

and elaborate that the shopkeeping and working classes have neither leisure nor money to share in them. They demand too a kind of aptitude and elasticity of body seldom found in those who work for their bread with their bodies, or are much shut up within doors. They have become in fact almost as much the privilege of the upper classes as their intellectual culture and their academic life. So far from fusing classes they have divided them more; and the worst charge that can be brought against English sports and pastimes in our day is that the poor minister to, but do not share them. If we all related our experience we should be obliged to confess, I think, that they are not the best of the poor who perform this office, and that they are not the better for the service. The social effect of these games must necessarily be exclusive. They may and do produce many qualities of especial value in association with equals; but limited as they are to a class, they must increase class sympathy at the cost of human sympathy; they must be an influence not to be weakened, but to be balanced by those who adjust the moral forces of school-life. It is perhaps worth while to add that the personal effect of athletic games in producing a vigorous and dexterous body added to a privileged culture and a long association with equals may be to produce a self-reliance and sense of completeness, not of course incompatible with compassion for the less fortunate, but not favourable to sympathy with them. It is less easy for those who have never wanted any-

thing from others to imagine the numbers who want much from them.

It is possible no doubt to allow that school-life and training may tend to produce this result, and yet to deny the result as a matter of fact. But the complaint of the hardness of culture has been made against other periods of Renaissance in art and literature than our own; and it is heard now. It is not very uncommon to meet men with the keenest sympathies for all nature except human nature; without interest in any one outside a narrow circle of congenial souls; and exalting the canons of taste almost into a moral code. What they lack yet appears to them to be not wider knowledge of men and the elevation that comes of serving them, but a further initiation into the refinements of art or the subtleties of inquiry.

Great as is the number of men who are devoting the best results of education to lifting up their fellow-creatures, it is small compared to the great increase in the number of those whose education fits them for the task. And the cry is still for more men; for men of leisure, culture, and zeal, for a task which somehow or other our education does not seem at all necessarily to dispose us. It cultivates to a high pitch the intellect and the taste; it develops to noble proportions our sense of duty to ourselves and our equals, but it leaves the sympathies only partially expanded; and it somehow fails, as a general rule, to impress a sense of the wide society of the future life on earth, and of the duty of using all these cultivated energies

in its service. To be of use is the highest privilege ; and the usefulness or failure of his life in the world is the natural motive to a boy at school. It is his future life ; so imminent and so engrossing as to banish into dim distance his life beyond the grave. It is an ever-present motive to thoughtful boys (not always perhaps realized in consciousness but always there), like the motive of the world to come which crowds closer upon men as they advance in years. It is natural and healthy that it should be so ; but the effect of modern education on a boy is, perhaps inevitably, to fill the prospect with himself. It is impossible not to make success the condition of reward, or to dispense with the motives of distinction and a career. The satisfaction of the natural hopes of friends and the supreme duty of making the best of ourselves come in as motives to save the others from the danger of degenerating into selfishness ; but their range is limited at best ; and the highest result of culture is not reached unless the highest motive of culture is prominent.

There are many elements in the education of a man which no teaching perhaps can enable a boy to realize. He can only faintly feel the discipline of responsibility ; the influence of change ; the expansive force of wide interests ; the sobering action of suffering ; the purifying effect of the dependence of others upon him. But he can learn that if his highest cultivation must come from communion with the Father, he must love those whom the Father loves or how can he love God ?

It will be comparatively easy for him to extend his sympathies to all his equals, and to feel compassion for his inferiors, but it will be less easy to convince him of his common humanity with the worst and most wretched of his kind; and of the burden, which his very birth imposes on him, of doing something to make them more like what God meant them to be, what man alone can make them.

Some callings directly or indirectly work towards this end. Others are so remotely connected with it that they demand the devotion to it of some regular portion of time, unless in the struggle for existence one of the two chief ends of life is to be lost sight of; unless the opportunity of forming some of the highest elements of human character is to be missed. This influence of association with suffering, this duty of helping the helpless, might be impressed on boys as a wholesome alternative to the influences of school-life; as a means of the highest culture; as the natural duty of manhood. That no life is perfect without this service might take rank with others as a maxim of education. It would supply some if not all that is lacking in it; and might suggest a different answer to the self-questioning which, in the pause after school and college life, repeats in various forms "what lack I yet?"—from that which it sometimes receives now.

In addressing an assembly like this it is impossible not to speculate on its influence upon the world and on the world's reaction upon it; for the reflexions cannot be separated. By the world is commonly

meant the class which represents the wealth and the wit, the power and the refinement of the world. This is a class which it is hard for average minds to influence, and it is the class whose influence upon the young is the cause of anxiety to their friends. But the great world, "the unknown quantity," is material upon which ordinary minds, with good education, can act with decisive effect, and no undesirable reaction need be feared upon those who go to it as teachers and helpers. It is natural to look to the public schools of England for recruits for this service, and all who are interested in their future and in the future of our country must hope that they will justify their high renown, by contributing to the relief of one of our greatest national wants. I can form no better wish for this great school (to which I am bound by many ties) than that it may add to its many other distinctions, the glory of sending out young men year by year, who, though separated by diverse callings and opinions, may be united by a common sense of the obligation of helping the ignorant, the suffering, and the degraded, and by a common attachment to the place where they learnt that such work as this was a prime element of a perfect life.

PROVIDENCE AND ANXIETY.

ST. MATT. vi. 25.—“ *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; neither for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* ”

It was to be expected that our Lord's exposition of the principles of His kingdom and of His rule of life to His disciples would be at once more exalted and more stringent than His teaching to His ordinary followers.

They were missionaries of His religion, and had accepted the hardships and responsibilities of that life. Their lot was a peculiar one, demanding a high degree of courage, forbearance, discretion, and self-denial. Their instructions, accordingly, are sometimes exceptional; necessary in their case, but impossible to carry out in the letter as the maxims of civil society. It is because people have forgotten this, and have interpreted some of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount by “the letter which killeth,” that some of it has been condemned as unpractical, visionary, and ill-advised. The spirit of it gave life to those who heard it to brave death in every form; it is the life of family and social union now.

It was not unreasonable that He should warn His hearers against anxiety about food and raiment, for they had left all and followed Him. Even the sweeping order of the English translation of what He said might be necessary for them, as it has been necessary for, or has at least been carried out, by many missionaries since His time. In the most literal sense Xavier took no thought for food or raiment. But even if He had required so much as this of His disciples, there would have been a spirit breathing through the words to modify their application. It would not therefore be safe to conclude, because the Sermon on the Mount is in part at least (so to speak) a professional address to exceptional persons and for exceptional work in the first century, that it has no meaning for Christians who are carrying on the common work of the world in the nineteenth.

Few orders could appear more hopeless to ordinary people than to be told to take no thought for food or raiment. It seems almost like a mockery of a life which is more than half made up of such anxiety. What blessing could be greater to the infinite majority of mankind than to be able to obey this command? Obedience (if it were possible) would seem to make heaven on earth.

But, in truth, our Lord imposes no such impossible task. He even asserts the regular order of the world's industries and man's share in them, when He contrasts us with the birds of the air, because they neither sow nor harvest—the first and most universal

instance of taking thought for the morrow. Are we not "much better than they?" Better, not only from the ennobling experience of taking thought for the morrow, but better because we are able, after taking thought, to cast off all anxiety about it. His appeal to men to do this is His tacit tribute to their worth in His sight. God had made something more than birds in making man; they were merely creatures of the air or of the earth; there was scarcely need to add, "Are ye not much better than they?" But it is hard to keep people up to the thought of what they really are. For men to take no thought for the morrow would be to live below the level of the brutes with whom our Lord contrasts them, because they sow and harvest. It would not only deprive them of one of the best schools of character, but the ceaseless anxiety of such a life would leave no time for higher work, and no inclination for nobler thoughts. It is only when men have taken thought for the morrow that they can be free from anxiety about it, and free to serve God in better ways. To talk of putting our trust in Providence is the merest irreverence until we have done all we can for ourselves; it is rather putting our trust in improvidence.

The lesson of the text is different; it tells us of a God who gives the harvest to the sower, and may be relied on to give it; it tells us when we have taken thought to cast away care, for the Divine Creator may be trusted to maintain the Divine order of the universe. It is hard to see how we could protest against the

extravagances and improvidence to be seen in all classes of society; how especially we could go to the poor with the ceaseless lesson of prudence and frugality, if we believed they could show us our Saviour's authority for taking no thought for the morrow; unless it was true that care and foresight were as much conditions of the kingdom of heaven as they are of civil society and of domestic life. The inner freedom to work and think is the result of forethought, not the token of the want of it. Men who can see before them, and know not only what ought to be done, but how much of it is possible and how much beyond their reach—who do all they can and then cast off all care—are the men who can devote themselves to the higher human ministries.

The counterfeit of this freedom from anxiety is the recklessness of those who are beneath this care, not superior to it; who are none the more the servants of God because they are not the slaves of mammon. It is possible to be very heedless and very selfish; very easy-going and very hard-hearted; very indifferent as to how food and clothing are to be provided, without a thought above them, or a care for others.

But it is necessary to face the question of food and clothing which is raised by this passage. It seems intended, on the one hand, to speak words of comfort to those whose chief anxiety is and must always be about food and raiment. They are encouraged to trust in a heavenly Father who feedeth the fowls of the air, and to believe that He will much rather feed

them, if they are true to their nature and to the laws of His creation. On the other hand, it is hard to escape the inference that a caution is intended for those who, being by their circumstances free from all anxiety about such things, spend too much time, thought, and money upon them. To be a Christian, if the word has any meaning, must be first of all to regard things from the point of view of Jesus Christ, and so in this case to endeavour to find out what view He would take of the expenditure of time and money on food and dress in which we allow ourselves.

It is worth while to notice first the ground which He takes in His teaching. He dwells entirely, in this passage at least, on the reflex action on character of over-attention to these things. He does not raise the question of political economy involved in the distribution of wealth, nor the question of charity raised by the disciple who thought the perfumed ointment might be sold for the benefit of the poor. He regards it as a personal matter. He appears to condemn excess in dress and food, whether of amount or variety, because it dwarfs human nature; because it provides an interest at once low and ever present, in which men may rest and never try to rise above it to the higher regions where the human mind can find its more appropriate objects; because of the tendency of such tastes to become ends in themselves; to be at once energy and aim, and to leave no room for higher wishes in the satisfied heart.

If it is fair to infer that this was the opinion

expressed by our Lord about the matter, it is more than ever necessary to consider the morality of the question, because probably no one whose memory reaches back a quarter of a century can deny that there has been a great increase in costly living since that date. One seems almost to remember a sudden impulse given to it about then, and to be able to trace a regular growth in it ever since. It must have a considerable effect on the character of most of those who are able to indulge in it, though no one would say that it is impossible to live for the glory of God and for the good of man, amid purple and fine linen and daily sumptuous fare. There may be people on whom these things sit very lightly—women who dress richly, and men who live daintily, whose lives are a pattern; who go about their life's work unconscious almost how they live. But it is probable that this is only when other conditions of life and character harmonize with such modes of living. When they occur to people whose aims are for any reason above such things and their thoughts beyond them; when there is neither any disposition to be absorbed in them, nor any need for anxiety about them; then they seem to cause less wear and tear of the fine texture of a man's nature. At the best, enjoyment of such things needs some counterpoise; it is provided sometimes by a strong sense of the invisible world; by active sympathy; by more elevated tastes, like the love of art or nature; by the desire to rule, or by love of managing. It can hardly be doubted

that without something within or without to raise men above such interests and make them feel they are independent of them, the mere fact of sumptuous living is likely to damage a man, and of varied and costly dressing is likely to damage a woman. Of all those who need such antidotes as have been mentioned, the proportion of those who possess them is probably small; but even with them this style of living can only be harmless when it comes as a matter of course. As soon as it becomes a difficulty it begins to degrade; and it cannot descend far in the social scale before it causes painful effort; before it consumes an important share of income, and occupies thoughts which have higher objects. People to whom it comes as a matter of course and to whom it may be harmless, are often without knowing it putting a painful strain on poorer neighbours by the general lift of the whole level of expenditure which their way of living occasions.

We are accustomed to hear of the large proportion of income spent by the working class on food and dress, and we are told that they take their cue from those above them; but the evil does not begin with the lower class; it ends there. There are many of the refined and comparatively wealthy class living in all respects like the wealthiest, to whom the expenditure on "the body," as our Lord calls it, must be a very serious consideration, and who, by the damage done by such anxiety to a more sensitive moral tissue, must be suffering a deterioration cor-

responding to, but very different from, what appears either as a brutalized nature or as a vain and frivolous one in the working classes.

There is hardly any duty of which the upper classes in this country are more honourably conscious than that of setting a good example. It is surely worth the while of those who feel this obligation, even if they believe themselves to be unaffected by the way in which they live, to consider whether what is harmless to them (because it comes to them without thought) may not be the means of absorbing thoughts and degrading aims in people of feebler characters and smaller means. It is difficult to conceive the benefit it would be to society if people of wealth and influence would set a resolute example of greater plainness in food and dress. The force of example is no doubt very great, but it is not always proportioned to the effort made to set it. We do things as a matter of duty and for the sake of example, as it is said, and are discouraged from making further attempts by the failure of what we have done already. But we can hardly expect imitators when we pass by a great and obvious source of influence like this, and set examples in matters of our own selection as make-weights against what is left undone. For we are never so little likely to be imitated as when we are posing as examples; never so likely to have followers as when we are setting an example without knowing it.

But our Lord gives a further hint to those who try

to make their neighbours better by the way they live, and that is not to be content with merely negative action, but to counteract one taste by suggesting and encouraging another. When He says, "Is not the life more than meat?" He means to rebuke a degrading anxiety; but He seems also to say, If the life and the body are to occupy your thoughts, surely the life which is sustained by food is a nobler object of thought than the food which sustains it; the body that is clothed than the clothes which cover it.

It is one of His suggestive bywords, easy to pass over, and may be meant as a hint, to those who have no taste for what is spiritual, of an ennobling relief from the sordid care of providing for the body; or as a rest and change for those who have. If the life is more than meat, he who thinks about the life is more of a man than he who thinks about the meat. The very fact of life, apart from the origin of it, is enough to fill us with wonder. To have begun to live at a given time and then to go on living always; to come from and to go to, we know not where; to think that generations of men have gone on so appearing and so disappearing since we know not when; to be planted on the surface of this little planet with infinite space all round, insignificant in the midst of universes and yet able to control their forces and to determine their laws; to find this mysterious power so intimately connected with the materials of the earth that it gains or loses by every change in the matter with which it is connected; to feel it acting in and through

each molecule of matter, and yet to be wholly unable to trace its origin, to find out its connexion with matter or to know what it is; to observe that this force is maintained by what we put into the body and what we put on it; to mark its development through all its stages to the border-land which unites rather than separates plants and animals; then to follow it from the sentient plant and the half-conscious animal till it culminates in man, and is strangely associated with something higher than animal life in him;—this is to find a new meaning in our Saviour's question, "Is not the life more than meat?"

The body is as interesting as a subject of study, as the principle of life is as a matter of speculation. Some little knowledge is necessary even to teach that respect for it without which we cannot work or think. We inhabit this house all these years and never penetrate to its secret chambers, or care how or of what materials it is built up. And yet we are dependent on the condition of every nerve for doing work that will live when the body is dust. This is not a question of men's moral relation to life or body, but of the claims of each to thought; of the high claim of the body put forth by Him who wore a human body, when He asked, in almost pitying wonder, "Is not the body more than raiment?" It is fair to conclude that our Lord was encouraging men to the study of nature in these words; that He was suggesting more elevated interests than some of the relations in which men habitually study their bodies.

We are told of Him that He knew what was in man ; not only his affections, that seek a home, and his spirit, that longs after immortality ; but his intellect, that cannot rest without knowing all that can be known. He has given us not only a spiritual world to long after and to dream on, but the “material universe as the complement of the mind of man ;” and the study of its laws, not only to redeem him from lower thoughts about food and raiment, but to raise him to a higher level of self-knowledge. “The author of man’s reason is the author of nature’s facts ; they must be commensurate. The reason must be meant to act upon the facts, the facts must be capable of being grasped by the reason.”* The Divine Author comes with man’s capacities into the world of nature which is their object, and goes in and out among his fellow-men, dropping hints of His will to those who have ears to hear, and revealing details of His administration that could only come through the familiar intercourse of the lips. Laws of varying dignity and kind, but all tending one way ; all parts of the divine philosophy that is His nature expressed in words ; all tending to raise us to the level of our humanity that is to Himself ; all in various ways building us up into the perfect man, the Divine ideal whose education is begun on earth and whose home is the kingdom of heaven.

* Professor Tyndall.

LAST WORDS.

ST. JOHN xvi. 12.—“ *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*”

THIS is what always happens on the eve of a parting ; there are always many things to say which are left unsaid, generally because the speaker cannot say them, and not because the hearers cannot bear them. Hearts are too full then for much speech, and looks and gestures and signs well understood take the place of words, and silence seems more natural than speech ; but with us it is because we cannot speak, not because others cannot bear now what we have to say.

It was not so with Christ ; what He said and left unsaid was regulated by regard for others, and not by His own feelings. The great thought of His universal redemption never made Him unmindful of His chosen friends. More than once He resisted attempts to impose on them what they could not bear ; and even at the last, when He knew how precious His words would be to millions of His followers yet unborn, He kept silence about “ many things,” He tells us, because those who had been with Him could not bear to hear them. We have read of the last words of many

of the great teachers and friends of humanity, but most of them have left us with a farewell, with a closing scene, in which they have summed up their teaching and said their last word; and it has rarely happened that any one has gone away, saying that he "left half told" his principles or his prophecies because his followers could not bear to hear them.

Though we have the full report of that last meeting which St. John has preserved, it is difficult to suppress a feeling of disappointment as we read these words. We may have another Socrates or Marcus Antoninus, but this was an unique occasion. The Son of man comes only once among the sons of men, and after a short life goes away with the saying on His lips that He has "many things to say" to us, which He does not say, because His followers, untrained and ignorant men, are not fit to receive them.

According to our way of thinking they might have been disregarded in the interests of humanity: as we may think that Christ might have taken some means to have His other words recorded and preserved for future ages, instead of leaving them to the memory of those who heard them, to be committed to writing, some of them half a century after He was gone back where He was before. Besides the many things He would not say, we have lost many that He did say; and it is no easier to understand why we have lost these than why He did not say the others. But what an opportunity seems to have been wasted! We gather from what He did say, that His teaching then

would have been, even more than usual, concentrated and direct, dealing with the high spiritual truths that marked His conversation on that last night, speaking plainly perhaps about difficulties and mysteries which have divided Christendom almost ever since He left the earth; revealing more of the truth about our relation to Him, to the Divine Spirit, to the Eternal Father, than He has left us now. All His discourse at that last supper is so exalted and far-reaching; it seems to sum up all He said and did among men; it has so much the special value of last words in its penetrating suggestions and in its spiritual insight that they may well grudge the loss of "many things" like these, and wonder what the rest could have been; and wonder more that anything could have stood in the way of their being spoken. Such a chance can never come again; it seems to have been missed for such an inadequate reason; the loss can never be known; it can never (so it seems) be repaired in any other way. These are natural thoughts; but it is quite as true as any of these views about it, that our Lord never did profess to tell everything; that He spoke briefly, sometimes darkly; that He left us much to work out for ourselves; that He represented His life rather than His words as the Gospel to men.

It does not seem to be the object of the Gospels to provide a set of rules for every condition of life, not even to tell in detail all the truth about the relations in which men stand to the visible and the invisible

world. In no sense and in no case are men treated like children, with all duties mapped out, and all they have to learn explained; so that there is less excuse than seems at first for any feeling of surprise or regret that He should have left the earth with the hint of all He had to tell, when the hour of parting came. Those who had been with Him all throughout ought to know (He seems to say) what His teaching would be on the questions which arose in them and among them—dividing their own hearts, and dividing heart from heart among His followers—though they could no longer hear His voice nor see His shape. And it is quite consistent with this treatment that He should not only leave many things untold, but that He should tell them so. Without this warning men might have thought that He had told them all, and that there was nothing more to learn: and when He was gone they would have rested on what they had got, and remained always in the pupilage which it does not seem to be His will that they should linger in. For it would have been a state of pupilage if He had been always here; to listen to His teaching about “many things” that men have now to decide for themselves; to submit to His authority questions that puzzle or divide opinion. But the visible Master was removed and the age of Christian manhood began, when the time for tutors and governors was past, and each was left to the teaching of the Spirit; as in the experience of individual life we are left (as has been said) to our own responsibility, to teach ourselves that is when education is done, as

the only condition of forming any character. From the analogy of human life (for so large a part of which we are a guide to ourselves) we should have expected that our Lord would have left us to the teaching of the Spirit. What is remarkable is, that He should have told us "He had many things to say unto us" which He would have said; and should have implied that He left us to find them out for ourselves. He went further. He promised the Holy Spirit as a help to find out "all truth;" to find out, that is, the many things He would have told us. So that things as great and true as He would have told are within the power of man, with the help of the Spirit, to discover; and he is urged by these parting words of Christ to find them out.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that if we had heard the many things He had to say, it is not likely that any of them would have been such as man is not able with Divine help to discover for himself. The Spirit, He says, will guide us into all truth; but we know that there are many questions of the deepest interest on which the wisest and the holiest men can get no light. On these it may be assumed then that He would have shed none. Only what the Spirit reveals to pure eyes and thoughtful hearts would He have told us if He had finished the story which He "left half told." It is tempting to think of the number of questions which vex individual hearts and array Church against Church that He could have decided. His word about Church government,

about the nature of the Christian ministry, about the character and efficacy of the sacraments, about His own atoning sacrifice, about the authority of the Church and the Bible—His word about these would seem to have ensured the fulfilment of His prayer that we “might all be one;” doubt and difference would have been at an end in the presence of that authoritative decision. So of the great human questions of God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will, of a previous existence, of the origin of man, of the conditions of a future state, of the mystery of the existence of sin and pain in the world—inquiries that occur to intelligent children, that have exercised anxious men from generation to generation. How strange it seems that we should be left in almost absolute darkness about them! How irresistible would have been the impulse to inquire! How little likely that any of the many things He had to say would have satisfied curiosity!

But if it may be assumed that insoluble questions and great mysteries would have been left unsolved and mysterious still, to discipline men, to elevate, and to brace them; surely this hint of the many things He had to tell gives a new importance to all that men have discovered since He spoke, gives the authority of His words to what His Spirit has revealed to them, and leaves the possibility of ever fresh discoveries—the result of that guiding into all truth, which is their consolation for losing the many things He had to tell.

We rightly look back with reverence to writers of the apostolic age, as to those who lived near to the source

of the sacred spring, and naturally look back for information to those whose works have stood the test of time; but it must not be forgotten that darkness was hanging then over many subjects on which now there is daylight, and that the promise of the Spirit to guide men into all truth shows that His guidance is with them still, and warns them that they need it to guide them into the truth about what they read, no less than about what they hear and see about them. Much that was written to explain or to expand the teaching of Christ for which we might claim the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, is rejected by large bodies of our fellow-Christians, who therefore would not allow that it was written under His guidance. Many of the secrets of nature known to us the Holy Spirit did not reveal to them; why are we to conclude then that the same gracious guidance is not with us (as He was with them) to unfold and illustrate Divine truth that we believe to be unlocking the mysteries of nature to our eyes? Side by side with the study of nature has grown up the science of historical criticism, which applied to the Bible, may yield to us some of the many things He would have told us. More important still is the increased study of metaphysical science, which has given a spiritual force to words that were imprisoned in a material meaning before.

We can feel no stronger impulse to apply all the light at our command to the elucidation of Scripture than the hope and the hint that we may possibly be

discovering some of all He would have said if those who heard Him could have borne it. It gives so much dignity to human life to think of this vast mission of discovering what was left unsaid, that this alone is reason enough for withholding it.

Every student of the kingdom of heaven, or of the kingdom of nature, is thus transformed into a prophet, commissioned to declare truths from the Lord of both kingdoms, bound to tell nothing that any prayer or any study can make more sure to him, and binding us to receive what he says with no scoffs and no impatience, but to search diligently whether these things are so. It is this condition of the possibility of receiving new light from heaven at any time which makes human life at once so difficult and so sublime ; it might have been otherwise with all truth written plain and mapped out like children's books ; but men would have been children all their lives, and progress, *i.e.* moral health and life for the world and for individual men, would have been impossible. And if it be as true of us as of any other age, that we may be taught of God even in things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven, as we know we are about the order of nature, we must accept the responsibility of receiving or rejecting the teaching of past ages, as we do that of receiving or rejecting the discoveries of living teachers or of contemporary books. If God is always with His people, He is guiding them now as ever into the truth about what His people have written and said in past ages ; showing them perhaps

a new meaning in old words ; presenting an aspect of truth to them which was hidden from a less metaphysical age ; revealing Himself, in a new relation undreamed of by those whose training and experience did not suggest or demand it, but vital to our dependence on Him, whom He has guided through other truths into new longings, and new conceptions of Him.

If it be true again, as is said, that we cannot exhaust the meaning of Divine truth or of the true speech of any man about Divine things, then it would seem to be the very function of the Eternal Guide to show us new meanings of old words ; to flash upon us His own light reflected from another face of some old truth, that never beamed on men who may have seen other light that we have not.

It may be as true of words as of things, that they reveal new meanings to reverent study. For many ages men looked on the forms of nature and saw little of the meaning in them that has been revealed to this age. They saw isolated entities where we see unity and design. As we have found life and energy and order in dead matter, may it not be granted also to us to advance more and more towards a spiritual interpretation of words that were encased in a material husk before ? may not this be a natural and parallel revelation to the discovery of life and order in nature ? may it not be the instrument of liberty to many hearts and consciences ? may it not be the means and the signal of unity amongst ourselves ?

But it cannot be denied that there are many indi-

cations that if Christ were visibly present among us now He might say to us, as He did to His disciples, not only "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them," but "I am saying many things, and ye do not bear them." Men do not bear well what is true if it be new. It is a shock to be delivered from the old bondage to the letter, and to be ushered into the new freedom of the Spirit. They feel as if they had lost something when the old material vesture of a doctrine or a truth is cleared away, and the spirit of it is disengaged. They like to have all their religion fixed and formalized for them, and dread the progress of politics and science, for fear of slipping from their old moorings and losing all they had to assure them that they were right and safe. It demands more effort and more trust to see and receive the spiritual meaning of words as their true meaning, just as it demands more faith and courage to accept all fresh discoveries in politics and science as revelations, as part of what He would have told to His first followers if they could have borne it; as what He is telling us through the guiding Spirit.

For it is inseparable from a belief in an inspiring Spirit that we should believe that He is a Spirit of progress; and if of progress at all, above all of progress in the knowledge of Divine truth, in the knowledge of the material universe, and of the condition of man. And yet these are the very spheres in which men are most impatient of new light. The spiritual interpretation of Scripture seems to be un-

dermining the foundations of faith ; the discoveries of physical science seem to be the overthrow of what the other has undermined, and the progress of mankind seems to some to be the same as the destruction of society. We cannot bear even now the light that is flashing on every eye, the voices that are pouring into every ear. We shut eyes and ears to them, not because they are not true, but from an uncomfortable suspicion that they are; and as yet without the conviction that if they are true they can only come from the Spirit of truth.

We have many things that we must accommodate both eyes and ears and hearts to, but the experience of life which has reconciled us to so many revelations in the past, seems to have no effect on the majority in making them hopeful or trustful of new light in the future. But however much we may dread the spirit of the age in which we live, it must be allowed to be seeking truth—truth at all risks, and in all departments. And if what is true can only come from One source ; though it may clash with old prepossessions and shock old feelings, it must be received and welcomed as a new gift from Him whom we profess to follow, with more emphasis perhaps than some who are entering into the truths that startle us. All that we find it hard to bear now may well be compared with the originality of Christ's teaching to the men of His own generation. We have accepted this and we want to stereotype our own interpretation of it, and to go no further. We are loath to believe that

much that offends us in modern inquiry is His teaching too, and feel like Pharisees and Sadducees when some law or some truth of His kingdom takes the unwelcome shape of a practical invasion of our prejudices or our rights.

Belief in the Holy Spirit implies above all things a confidence that all He is revealing to men now will show them more plainly of the Father by opening wider the book of nature and the book of revelation; and will teach them more and more to see in all about them the work and the image of the Divine Son.

SELF-DENIAL.

ST. LUKE ix. 23.—“ *And He said unto them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.*”

As if to show the breadth of this injunction, it is uttered just after our Lord had been feeding the hungry multitude. The disciples had urged Him to send them away; they may have been weary of them—at least, they were embarrassed with the difficulty of feeding them. Perhaps they grudged the quiet hours of their Master's company they were losing as the people stayed.

They did well to think much of this privilege, and probably did not suspect that they were thinking of themselves as much as of Him in their desire to be alone. Anyhow, it is not to the people he speaks of self-denial. He feeds them and lets them go. An ordinary teacher might have talked to the fainting crowd about the duty of subduing their appetites, and reminded them what a much more glorious thing it was to be listening to His teaching than attending to their bodily wants. Or he might have expressed surprise that they should even be conscious of physical longings at such a time. We can fancy some

preachers who would have thought this a great opportunity of inculcating the subjection of the flesh. But there is not a word about self-denial until the people are gone, and He is alone praying with His disciples. Then comes out, as it so often does, His deep insight into their hearts, and His subtle and delicate way of showing that He had read them. It was a time for fostering any pride they might have had in their exclusive intimacy with him. The multitude sent away, and they alone retained ; the lonely hillside and the common prayer ; the privileged companionship with His mysterious personality ; all circumstances so productive and so suggestive of self-devotion ; all so likely, under the subtlest veil of self-devotion, to tend to the exaltation of self. So He seems to have thought, for He chooses the time when one of them, in the name of all, had confessed Him to be the Christ, and when all thought of self might seem to have been lost in adoration of Him, to say, " Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself." It is a very suggestive surrounding to His words. A superficial view of things might have led men to expect such words at some rich supper at a Pharisee's ; at the table of the wealthy publican ; at the great feast at St. Matthew's house ; even at the wedding when He was asked for wine. We can fancy a solitary or an ascetic appearing like a spectre at banquets where He was a genial guest, and denouncing their indulgence and display. He taught different lessons there : " When thou makest a dinner or supper call not thy friends and rich neigh-

bours," but those who cannot recompense thee ; or again, " Seest thou this woman ? "—thou who at a feast, the very symbol of fellowship, will scarcely own her common humanity. Or He showed His sympathy with the innocent joys of a peasant's wedding by furnishing the wine. At feasts He taught the lessons of feasts ; but for the teachers of men He had different ones. They had to set Him forth before the eyes of all men ; and how could they represent His perfect image, whose nature was self-sacrifice, unless they were first delivered from the bondage of self ?

The men that followed Him in His temptations were in little danger from the common allurements of life. They had settled their account with these, and had come to find out, as they listened to warnings of self-denial addressed to those who had left all and followed Him and who had not where to lay their heads, that the victory over self-indulgence was only half the battle. For after the thought " we have left all and followed Thee," arose in one of them the hope " what shall we have therefore ? " When all the claims of the body had been subdued, and all the delights of friendship and of home abandoned, there remained the wider field to win of self-assertion.

Many men who never heard the name of Christ have effectually mastered all their appetites, and for various motives ; and many Christians in all ages have done the same. But it has often happened that this discipline has been the mere handmaid of personal ambition ; conquerors, philosophers, and

devotees have practised it for distinctly personal ends. Its tendency, without the controlling and purifying influence of an exalted motive, is by no means necessarily in the direction of what is now called self-effacement.

Our Saviour saw that there were less obvious but more deadly foes than any that asceticism could face ; and He gives His little band of followers, who might be thought to have lost even their personality in His, the unexpected warning, that if they mean to follow Him they must deny themselves. He spoke as to Christians, knowing that it was a small thing for those who claimed His name to have risen above such temptations as men share with brutes, but knowing too that when all these voices are hushed, new suggestions arise, more seductive, if not so loud as the claims of appetite.

They were separated from the world, and made the most important persons in it. How could the self which had been checked at one outlet fail to attempt another ? How likely they were to assume that self-indulgence was conquered, and to seek its compensation in self-importance ! It would be quite natural for any body of Christians professing the same devotion to Christ that that little group did, to make the same assumption about themselves ; and it might not seem extravagant to expect that men who profess to be servants of such a Master, and honour by public services the men who followed Him as Saints, had got beyond this preliminary trial of courage and faith.

How far it is true of each man is only known to himself; but whoever has satisfied himself on this point must know himself well, and must be prepared for the harder struggle of which our Lord warned His followers.

It is easy to throw stones at any class in the community about this matter of indulging personal tastes, for it is the habit perhaps of most men to limit their self-indulgence in more or less refined forms by their income only; and it is extremely difficult to draw the line where personal expenditure begins to be excessive, and ceases to conduce to the benefit of the individual, and of the community at large. It would not be wise to try to draw any such line, or to denounce any indulgences except such as stand condemned by the profession of Christianity. It will be much more profitable to consider whether there are any personal habits which tend to make men less fit to occupy their appointed places in the world; whether there are any which make them indolent when it is time to work; luxurious and effeminate when exertion is required; irritable when they ought to be patient; exacting when they ought to be considerate; for there are indulgences which have this effect upon the nerves. Do any of our indulgences scant the enjoyments of others? do any of our pleasures demand degrading offices of them? do any of our ways make us an element of discord, instead of harmony, in home-life? do any of them make it irksome to meditate or pray? is life without them

insipid, and the prospect of death intolerable? If a man would examine himself honestly in this way, and would act on the results of this analysis, he would find more benefit from it than from dietary observances; though it may be a very good thing to have rules when we cannot do without them.

When all this is done there remains the more formidable enemy, self-assertion; for to deny is the opposite of to assert as well as of to indulge, and we live in an age in which self-assertion is the more common temptation, at least among the more educated classes. For in spite of the great increase of wealth, it may be doubted whether the upper classes spend a larger proportion of income on mere physical indulgence than the lower—except the actual labouring class—if we set aside the items of comfort and display. But independent of mere personal pampering, every one is conscious how obtrusive and domineering his own personality is—the ascetic as well as the voluptuary, the poor as well as the rich; how each man is the centre foreground of every picture in his mind's eye, rather how he fills all the canvas. How ready all are to assert their dignity, to stand upon their rights, to fancy themselves slighted, to back their own opinions, to believe in their own infallibility, to consider how everything will affect them; how swift to speak most men are, and how few good listeners there are in the world! Our most sacred moments tend to make us think we are not as other men; our most Christian duties are tainted with this spirit of self.

These are all manifestations of the same spirit of exclusiveness, the habit of thinking that we are exceptions—not like other people—and demanding a different treatment. It is a spirit which may reveal itself in many other ways than in those already noted. It may be too deep-seated and self-satisfied to show itself at all; for there is a pride too proud to ask for homage or to court sympathy, or to condescend to assert itself, and the sociable man as well as the reserved may be the victim of it. It is the wrong side of self-respect, and of that abiding sense of individuality no thoughtful man can ever lose—a feeling that itself tends to evil when it is not corrected by the sense, as strong, of being members of a society knit together in Christ, and every one members one of another. A man who has made his sense of the equality of all men before God a working conviction of his daily life, and not merely a speculative inference from his religion, has got the best antidote to this pride of heart.

These are great human faults, as old as the world and as widespread as mankind; but the spirit of self has taken different shapes in different nations and at different times. Nations have been carried away by the passion for military glory, and have lost sight of the rights of others in indulging their passion; they have been carried away by insane beliefs in El Dorados beyond the seas; have been immersed in the pursuit of wealth at home; they have been borne along by the current of religious fanaticism; they have crushed the great majority of their fellow-country-

men under a feudal or social or royal oppression. We may see in our own country (besides the pursuit of wealth, which is losing its passionate force now that wealth comes so easily to so many people) a deliberate preference of self avowed as the motive not only of private lives, but, in a sense, of public undertakings, though not of national legislation.

There is much on the other side; much effort, national, social, private, that is purely Christian; more than ever, perhaps, of unselfish working for the good of all. But the doctrine of "the survival of the fittest," to those who watch the tendencies of the time, is beginning to bear fruit in practice; and the axiom "that the weakest must go to the wall" has found a learned and eloquent exponent. It may be seen in the way in which those who think their lives or their work important shun social duties, claim exceptional treatment, and exact multifarious services; in the way in which the great duty of self-culture is made an excuse for neglecting many others—for being deaf to the claims of the ignorant and needy, for want of sympathy with the uncultivated and unrefined. It appears in much of the language heard about the new impulse recently given to education, which is often regarded merely as a means of advancement in the world; and the motive put before the young is often no higher than that if they learn they will be rich. I am not denying the value of what is called secular education—it is so infinitely better than none that words cannot express the difference;

but a really secular education, if it is possible—one, that is, from which every motive but material ones should be excluded—would exactly express this spirit of the exaltation of self, for it would banish the ideas of love and duty as motives for self-improvement. It cannot be denied that much that we hear about it, though probably little of its practical working, exhibits it to the young in this naked ugliness. History teaches us that an artistic and literary age is apt to be a hard one (as has been seen in the successive periods of revival in literature and art), and there are not wanting signs of a certain hard indifference to the poor and the rough in our distinctly cultivated classes, not only yielded to, as a temptation too strong to resist, but avowed as a theory, and adopted as a habit of life.

Every man, as he can watch and control the rising of this spirit of antichrist in his flesh or in his spirit; in his home life, in his private habits, in his social or official relations; so he can do something as a member of the commonwealth to check its manifestations wherever it takes the shape of a public undertaking or the set of a current of social feeling. It is difficult to detect in its disguises, which are as plausible and delusive under the form of public good, as when it betrays us with the plea of personal rights or justifiable indulgences. There is no possibility of living a merely negative life of opposition to its influence; only the might of a new love can expel the dominion of the old; only the setting up of a supreme object of our affections can prevent them from being centred on ourselves.

LOVE AND HATRED.

1 ST. JOHN iii. 13.—“*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*”

A MAN has perhaps more to fear now from the love than from the hatred of the world. For whatever other meaning the “world” may have (and its meaning varies a good deal with those who use it), the opinion of the world must always mean, to any one person, the opinion of the great mass of people who do not know him well, and therefore judge him superficially. A man may win the love of the world in this sense by gaining credit for qualities he does not possess; by actions which are an exception to the whole bent of his character and not the expression of it; by conduct which is more likely to please than to benefit those who give him in return the transitory compensation of their applause. Now and then such an undeserved return might shame or stimulate a generous nature to live up to the world’s estimate and be what others think him; but most men find it a difficult position to be “popular,” and realize the truth of the saying, “Woe unto you, when all men speak good of you!” For besides that it is likely to

make people foolish and vain, the temptation is strong to continue the rôle which has succeeded so well at first, and pass from an unconscious into a conscious hypocrite. Praise is sweet, and it is easy to win from the undiscerning; but it is not always gained by the exercise of the highest qualities or by living out the truest life. The first loss then is the sacrifice of what is best to what brings the speediest return. And the end can be nothing but self-contempt to those who are alive enough to look into themselves at all, and a cynical estimate of those who pay the hire for the labour done, hardly less damaging to character.

It is not a very wholesome state of mind to be indifferent to the world's opinion; for it may come of envy, or of despair of popularity, or from crediting ourselves with virtue because we are wanting in the qualities which win a shallow renown from others; so that a man may congratulate himself on the indifference of the world, though he has nothing in him to win its love. Or it may be a reaction from the love of praise and from the experience of the worthlessness of honour won from those who do not know us, for actions which they cannot rightly value. "Extremes meet," and the step from the popularity-hunter to the misanthrope is not a long one; the popular youth may easily become the Timon of middle age, as sated with praise as with pleasure; with no more respect left for himself than for those who tried to persuade him that he was what he knew himself not to be.

With a very small verbal change St. John's warning to his friends would be a very useful one to address to many Christians nowadays, who have a good many ways of winning liking, if not love, besides the solid qualities which alone deserve it. If the caution were well thought of, few better warnings could be given to such people at the outset of life, or at the beginning of a new career, or on assuming a new place in society, than "Marvel not, my brother, if the world" love "you." It is likely that it will; but do not you be made giddy by it, nor despise the world, nor plume yourself on the borrowed feathers in which it has dressed you up. Neither despise applause nor seek it, for either will make you indifferent to the approval of the good which is worth having (even as a test of conduct), and either will make you think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; and the end of both is a cold contempt of men who are probably as good as yourself, and contempt of men is much the same as death, if love is life.

The first readers of this Epistle would have marvelled if the world had loved them; there was no reason why it should. The world knew that the young community stole away children from fathers, and husbands from wives, and wives from husbands, and friends from friends, by a new and mysterious charm. Those who were so stolen were lost to them and to all that seemed to make life precious, and they thought that it was a "pestilent superstition" which denounced their old worship and

their old pleasures, and practised hateful rites of its own in secret; perhaps encouraged treasonable purposes under the guise of worship. The world was likely to hate it; it was like a garrison in an enemy's country, with every man's hand against it; it needed all the consolation that the assurance of the love of God and of the brethren could give it to enable it to keep up its heart.

There was probably some danger in using such language, even to the first Christians; only the strongest contrast of conditions could justify it; only the Christian's extreme need of caution and of comfort could require it. It would have been easy to exaggerate this feeling of contrast and separation, and make the believers think it more their work to preserve the faith undefiled than to proclaim it to the world; to make them forget that it was for the world which hated them that Christ lived and died.

The history of all religions bears constant witness to the strength of this temptation. Men have prized religious truth not for its power of winning the many, but because it was the exclusive possession of the few. They have looked, it might almost be said, with complacency on the lost condition of the world, if the faith of the true believers was unimpaired; they have thought the truth itself of more importance than the lives of those for whom it was revealed; as if man was created to receive the Gospel, and not the Gospel preached to redeem mankind. And the more they have departed from the simplicity of the first

message and exaggerated the importance of their own inferences, or even substituted them for that which was first delivered, the stronger has been this tendency to regard their own Church or their own sect as the faithful, and all others as the world ; on whom perhaps God may have mercy, but for whom man can have little hope. There is a strange incongruity between this claim to the profession of an orthodox belief and this want of sympathy with all who do not hold it, with the purpose of Christ to seek and to save those who were lost, and with the Mind which saw that all who were “not against Him were on His side.” He might see much of His spirit in those who are often called “the world,” and much of the world in the spirit of those who profess to be on His side ; if He were among us now.

It is interesting to speculate what class or classes He would call the world now. For there is no such broad line of distinction as could be drawn between the converted and the unconverted in apostolic days—though even then there were many whose hearts were with Him before they heard His name. Most of us, probably, have our own notions of what the world is, and most likely it does not include ourselves. If we derive our idea of it from the New Testament, it cannot. Our very profession, even our presence in church, forbids that ; for if it means anything in the New Testament, it means the spirit which is at enmity with the spirit of Christ ; and the least claim that they can make who call themselves by His name is to rule their lives

and hearts by the spirit that is in Him. But we generally apply the term to some part of the Christian world, and when we use it are seldom thinking of nations yet unconverted, or of what are called the "heathen masses" of our own country, or of the small body whom inquiry has led to a rejection of the Gospel. We are seldom thinking of these when we speak of the world. For the most part, what is meant by the world is the great mass of people who make some religious profession and practise some religious observance; and the conception is so far true that we can seldom assemble in any church without seeing that the spirit of the world has intruded there too. It is visible in most congregations, and just as each has his own notion of what the world is, so is it likely that each would be said by some body of Christians to belong to the world himself. The notion that any line can be drawn between the Church and the world must be given up in these days; the world is too much leavened by the spirit of Christ, the Church is too much leavened by the spirit of the world, to make that possible; but it does not therefore follow that they are the same, or that there is no meaning for us in the caution, "Marvel not if the world hate you."

Very few people have any experience of being hated by the world; at all events for qualities which even to their own minds can give them any grounds for thinking that they are hated for Christ's sake. For it is very far from diminishing a man's chance of popular

favour now to profess Christianity; indeed, those who are most hated for their opinions are the men whose speculations have led them to renounce it, so that no one can console himself under unpopularity with the thought that he is suffering for righteousness' sake, or be sure that he does not escape it because his Christianity is modified by the spirit of the world. But if we do not find ourselves hated, it might seem to many "no marvel" if they were; for we find within the seeds of hatred to others, and are perhaps conscious of a life that would not bear the light, and of a steady drift of inclination that is unrelenting in its cold indifference to all other joy or welfare except our own. We must not marvel that the world hates us if we merely use and enjoy it, and find easy good temper souring into weariness, or ready to start into active animosity with the first taste of satiety or the first symptom of opposition.

Certain classes, certain persons, certain subjects, rouse most men's hatred, not from deliberate disapproval, but from instinctive dislike; they take no trouble to control the feeling, but justify it, and make large exceptions to every amnesty. They may perhaps have grounds for their dislike, but they give grounds for dislike to others, of the same sort; and they know their own hearts besides, and all there is in them that would win little love if it were known; so that they cannot marvel if the world hates them. Some use might be made of these feelings—from the sternest moral disapproval down to the most fantastic

horror—if they only suggested to us the reasons and occasions for dislike we daily give, and the many more of which we are conscious. But those who are most ready with their intolerance of opinions, habits, and manners, often need the largest toleration for themselves, and go on all their lives never learning the lesson of charity from their own need of it ; never learning to correct in themselves the superficial faults that have awakened their rather artificial disgust in other people.

But love and hate are too large parts of character, too important for the welfare of the world, to be misdirected or frittered away. It is so easy to be exclusive and to reserve all love for our own set, and all our opposite feelings (hatred is too strong a term) for others. There are cliques of all kinds, religious, political, social, artistic ; and the divine feeling of hatred of wrong is misdirected against men because we differ from their opinions, or is parodied in a fashionable abhorrence of all who are outside a certain sacred pale ; or diviner love is wasted in affected raptures over those who agree with us, with no other result than a weakened capacity for loving and hating what ought to attract and to repel.

There is too little love and too little hatred in the world ; too little love of what is good for its own sake ; too little independence in our choice of friends ; too little resolute countenance of worth, compared with the claims of more conventional attractions. Hysterical admiration and affected enthusiasm leave

the heart rather too dry and cold to discern and grasp what is lovable for its own sake ; and it would be well if dislike of other men's opinions, and revolt against their tastes or their manners, were consistent with a more sturdy hatred of evil—a hatred that would allow no polish and no power to condone it. Let us hate, by all means ; but let us remember at the same time not to marvel if the world hate us if we hate amiss, and not to care though it do hate us if we hate aright. We have one power by which we can bear its hatred ; one test by which to try our own ; one consolation if in the way of duty we have lost friends ; one lesson of hating the sin of the world without hating the sinners. We should be sure, before we venture to smile, or to repine at the hatred of the world ; before we venture to indulge our hatred of the evil of it, of being able to say, “ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren ; ” by this we know that we are alive, when we feel the death of all evil in ourselves, and the living pulse of love for all men quick within our hearts.

SOCIAL PRESSURE.

ST. LUKE xiv. 1.—“ *And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched Him.*”

THE Sabbatarianism of the Pharisees does not seem to have excluded giving entertainments on the Sabbath, and the liberty allowed by Christ in the observance of it seems to have included going to them.

This is not the only time that we hear of His being at a feast on the Sabbath day, and His host on this occasion was not the only Pharisee who invited Him.

Want of hospitality (as far as it consists in giving entertainments) does not seem to have been one of the faults of the Pharisees. But guests are invited to houses for very various motives, and the motive determines the question of hospitality. Perhaps if the reasons for their being sent always accompanied invitations, there might sometimes, even among Christians, appear to be as little real hospitable intention in them as there was in the conduct of men who “watched” a guest at a banquet, to see whether He would commit Himself.

No doubt He was the principal guest. His social

importance, and the dishonourable motive for which He seems to have been invited, make that likely ; and the leading share He takes in the conversation fits the position. He had a dangerous and disagreeable part to play, for He knew the feeling of the company towards Him ; but He did not shrink from it. His place as a social reformer was wherever men gathered together, and He knew that there might be something in the customs of feasts, and in the manners of hosts and guests, that might wear a different aspect from the point of view of the kingdom of heaven. Abuses perhaps might have grown up that might be corrected ; or persons might be present who might get a hint that would fructify of a higher standard of morality regulating even such observances as these than that by which society is content to judge them.

If an ordinary person went into society now with this notion of a mission to reform it, it is probable that he would give much offence and would achieve nothing. But if his words were the least part of his witness for an invisible order of things, and his life proclaimed the highest law of love and right—if he was independent of men's opinions and at the same time devoted to their good, as the few great reformers of the world have been—there is no reason to think he would not be listened to and followed. The same truths, burning and irresistible as they were from the lips of Christ, would seem visionary and Utopian from one who did not show, before he began to teach others, that he was himself convinced.

We repeat and listen to the Divine philosophy of His original teaching and admire His lofty maxims, with the thought that they are perhaps too elevated for common use; just as we admire His life, like a part acted on a stage; but they do not stir us to action like a living voice with the strong lever of a life to move the dead weight of custom. And yet more than any life and any words they have moved and made society; so that no duty can be more binding and (it may seem sanguine to say so) no prospect more hopeful than still to proclaim the truths which once regenerated the world; still to have courage and self-denial enough to endeavour to live the life to which they commit His followers.

There are few things in which men are more mistaken than the way in which they underrate their influence for good or evil. Nothing is more incalculable than the results of a character or an action; few inquiries would be more surprising in their results than tracing the pedigree of an act or disposition, if we could follow it as we do a family to its source. To those who believe in the efficacy of a life for good or evil—who hope that, without being eccentric or presumptuous, they can bear witness in their ordinary daily duties and relations for greater reality of feeling and more pronounced unselfishness of motive than they see about them—such scenes as these in the life of their Master afford peculiar encouragement. They will not make the mistake of imitating His special actions, if they are filled with

His Spirit ; for the Spirit will express Himself through the peculiar genius of him whom He inspires ; perhaps in quite different ways and words from those in which He made Himself known in the life of Christ. But the effect will be the same, viz. that elevation of feeling about common things which seems to have been the aim of all He said at this feast. He makes no new rules. Life was too much formalized already for the men He was teaching. He refers the commonest usages of society to a principle of the kingdom of heaven, wide enough to determine many such cases. The lawyers and Pharisees assembled at the feast will give no answer as to whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. It is a professional question about which they will not commit themselves. He lifts it above the plane of technicalities when He asks, Which of you would not pull his ox out of a pit on the Sabbath day? The question is referred to the principle that "the Sabbath was made for man," and therefore that everything that tends to promote the good of men is helping to fulfil the intention of its Founder. Every one must apply this principle for himself, remembering that it is equally violated by those who coldly neglect the obligation altogether, and by those who petrify the principle of its institution into forms and rules.

There is not much danger of any excessive Sabbatarianism nowadays, but it is as well to remember when we are judging others, that there may be, as has been said, "a believing non-observance" of the Sabbath ;

and when we are determining our own course, that there may be an unbelieving observance of the Christian Sunday.

Another scene at this famous feast diverts our Saviour's comments from the ungodliness of the religious world to the vulgarity of the polite. For Pharisees and scribes and doctors of the law were of the upper classes in Judæa, and this charge of trying to get the best places at table is definitely brought against Pharisees in another place.

He noticed them choosing the best places at table, and the arrangement of their tables made some places much more important and agreeable than others. But he does not determine any questions of precedence or comment on ill-manners, but again raises the subject above anything that could create soreness or controversy. He reminds them of the highest standard by which men are judged, whether in earth or heaven—the opinion of the wise and good, of perfect wisdom and goodness; and of the fall to zero in this estimate that awaits the man who exalts himself. In fact, it is not necessary to be very wise or very good to condemn self-importance; the only wonder is that men should so invariably forget that it almost necessarily defeats its own object.

The same feeling that was displayed in the house of one of the chief Pharisees in the scrambling for places, perhaps in manœuvring for invitations beforehand, exists still, even if its manifestations are different. The point for us to dwell on as Christians is not that

it is foolish or ill-mannered, but that it is inconsistent with our belief in the higher value of the invisible world ; that it outrages the principles which we profess as the guides of our life ; that it shows a want of quietness and confidence in what is really worth having in life ; an insensibility to the difference between being and only seeming to be.

Nothing can bring out more strongly this contrast between fashion and reality than His next caution. Probably He marked again the style of guests assembled to meet Him, and noted that they were such as seemed likely to be able to recompense their host in some way. His well-known advice about receiving "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind," was more necessary, and more easy to follow, in a thinly peopled country with few inns and without any hospitals or poor-laws ; it might be unwise or impossible now, but the principle which underlies it is undying—to look for nothing in return for kindness. In a matter so purely conventional as hospitality has become, to try not to follow the multitude ; to try to spiritualize a custom into a grace ; to determine each for ourselves that we will do something, in ever so small a way, to resist the current of fashion ; to be simple and natural in the matter ; to make people our guests because it will please them, or at least please ourselves by expressing our regard for them, would be to enter into the spirit of the kingdom of heaven about this matter more truly than any mechanical obedience to a rule.

The true value of the pious ejaculation which follows, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of heaven," is perhaps insinuated in the parable which follows. The speaker's association of the kingdom of heaven with a feast seems to indicate His notion of it. The Jew's conception of happiness (into which comfort and prosperity entered so largely) comes out here; and the parable told at table (in harmony with the Eastern habit of story-telling) is designed to correct and elevate this view of heaven here or hereafter, and to suggest that all men are not so very eager to enter into it; that the constituents of happiness to the Jewish mind, property, land, and domestic happiness, might hinder its realization, instead of being essential features of it. One purpose of the parable seems to be to sum up His previous teaching; to embody, by a few typical instances, the various forms of that "social pressure" which hinders so many men from being what they are capable of being, and doing what they know they ought to do.

It was quite natural that One who came to renovate the world by founding a society, and lived in the society which was contemporary with Him, should anticipate and guard against some of the adverse pressure which He foresaw. Encountering the force of His teaching, which would compel men to do things they approved but did not like, He foresaw a force which would compel men to do things which they neither liked nor approved; which, unlike the allurements of appetite and the impulses of temper, would offer no satisfaction

in return for the obedience which it claimed ; which had no inducement to offer but the convenience and pleasure arising from conformity to the ways and opinions of other men, or immunity from the disabilities and annoyances which are the penalties of nonconformity. The greater part of our life is of course regulated by what is customary, and the cases in which it is innocent or praiseworthy to follow this rule are beyond enumeration ; but every one is aware of cases in which it clashes with a higher law of which he is conscious. The problem of social life is to determine these exceptions, and its trial is to dare to disregard the lower and to follow the higher obligation. The problem is difficult because the pressure of opinion, like that of the natural atmosphere, is not only heavy but uniform ; it surrounds us on every side ; it represses all attempts to rise ; it bars every outlet to independence of thought or action ; it applies an irresistible force, which is often hardly felt because it is never uneven or intermittent, and because we have grown up under it and have never known what it is to be free. The trial of resistance is severe, because it often involves the loss of friends, the sacrifice of the good opinion of those whose good opinion we think worth having, the imputation of self-assertion and a character for eccentricity. There is no support under it but the knowledge of a higher law of life to which the lower law of society must yield, and the joy of carrying out in conduct the convictions which are the bread of life to the soul within.

It is impossible to review our lives as members of a society without being aware of a number of cases in which, with no temptation of pleasure or interest, we do things which we disapprove or fail to speak or act independently—in obedience to fashion. The mighty motives of pleasure and interest are equal hindrances to living that high life of conformity to the dictates of an enlightened conscience from the pure motive of love of God which Christ calls “entering into the kingdom of heaven.” But social pressure often comes with no such bait in its hand; it claims obedience; it violates conscience; it leaves behind self-contempt, until we have got used to our chains. It does not press with equal weight on all strata of society: perhaps some of us here belong to the stratum to which it is most oppressive. Some are placed high enough to disregard it; in some classes its laws are less exactly formulated, its penalties less regular and severe; but it is the lot, no doubt, of a portion of society to feel its force very painfully; to find it very difficult to be at once independent and not regardless of the world’s opinion; to dare to carry out convictions, and at the same time to be sure that there is neither vanity nor perverseness in the venture to stand alone. For the liberty with which Christ has made us free is a deliverance as much from these spiritual temptations as from servile deference to the usages of the society in which we live.

Those who wish to see with how little reference to the higher law many of our relations with our fellow-

men are determined, may review their lives under a few main and very obvious heads. The motives for which acquaintances are sought; the artificial boundaries which exclude for the most part all below our own level in society; the means by which these limits are kept up; the customs which regulate the spending of money, and even the giving it in charity; the motives and the usages of hospitality; the reasons for which opinions are adopted and maintained; even such a matter as the allotment of places in church;—all these are instances in which use has sanctioned habits, many of which are open to question; many of which, if looked at in the abstract, without the misleading light upon them of prepossession or long familiarity, would be at once condemned. People are perhaps not very much to be blamed for falling in with the ways of those about them, until they become conscious of their inconsistency with their own professions; with the highest spiritual life for men on this earth, in which conduct answers quickly and truly to conviction; with the very motive of the existence of the Christian society in the world.

It may be thought that to refer trivial social acts and habits to such high principles is to exaggerate; to say that they involve such momentous issues is to be unreal; but nothing can be smaller than the habits which our Lord deigns to condemn, nothing higher than the principles to which He refers them. The reason why public opinion has accumulated such force, and why social pressure is

so heavy, is because for so many centuries Christians have gone on separating their life from their religion, forgetting that their life is their religion; thinking the small acts and habits which make up common lives too unimportant to be ruled by the law of heaven; not seeing the danger of making all life godless by ruling all its constituent, if trivial, parts without regard to God. Every one who without thought conforms, adds to this weight which hangs heavy round men's necks; every one who, in however small a matter, has the courage of his convictions, does something to lighten it; and so far as he can he is supporting that protest for independence and for charity against the pressure of our social surroundings which is the lesson to society from the social life of the Son of Man.

CLERGY AND LAITY.

ACTS vi. 1-4.—“ *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*”

It is no wonder in a community in which the members had all things in common—in which land-owners brought the price of their estates to the Apostles, in which distribution was made to every man according to his need—that murmuring arose. It would have been surprising if it had not. Unless the first Christians were something more than men, there must have been murmuring before that which led to the appointment of the seven deacons. It was the fact, probably, that the murmurings at last became organized and found expression as a party cry, that brought about the remedy. As long as it was general, and everybody was dissatisfied, there

was perhaps not much to find fault with ; but when one body of the converts, and those not of the inner circle of Judaism, thought themselves aggrieved, it was time to grant relief. These "Grecians" were to some extent strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and were more likely to imagine a slight where none existed, or to exaggerate a small grievance, than if all their associations had been as Hebrew as their blood. Anyhow, as those who complained were in some sense Greek, it is a proof of the desire of the Church to deal fairly with them that all the deacons were men of Greek connexions too, if one may judge from their names, for they are all of Greek formation.

It is not quite certain what office they were appointed to, for to "serve tables" may mean either to superintend the daily ministration in the most literal sense, or it may mean the higher duty of keeping the accounts of the new community ; and "tables" may be used somewhat in the same sense in which we say multiplication tables. The accounts of a society which had all things in common must have been large and complex enough to require the care of men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," as we hear the chief of the deacons was. But whatever their work was, it is remarkable that we never hear of one of them doing any of it. The names of five of them are never heard again. They may have done it quietly and conscientiously, as men full of the Spirit of God do any work they are set to do ; or they may have been like Stephen and Philip, who seem to have left their table-

serving to preach the Word of God, almost as soon as they were appointed to the new office.

The office of deacon in our own Church seems rather to have conformed itself to the example of the first deacons, than to the intention of those who appointed them. St. Paul, in his letter to the Philip-pians, addresses himself to "the saints in Christ Jesus, with the bishops and deacons;" and in writing to Timothy, he exacts very much the same qualifications for a deacon that he does for a bishop; evidently regarding them as offices the same in kind, spiritual in character and in functions. And the Church in our own day, whatever may be the custom among the sects, has refused to recognize any difference of a spiritual nature between the offices of priest and deacon, or to mark any distinction between what is called secular and what is called sacred in their service of Christ.

The Apostles seem to have tried to make this distinction; and to judge from all that is recorded in the Bible of the doings of the first seven deacons, and of the history of the office afterwards, it was a failure. They evidently recognized the sacredness of the office, as they would probably have claimed a sacred character for all lawful callings; for they chose men full of the Holy Ghost, and they ordained them to the office with prayer and the laying on of hands; but quite as evidently they regarded it as an inferior office to their own. We do not always imitate them in this belief of the sacredness of all honest work, though we often fall into the error—if it was one—of sepa-

rating duties which should be joined together, of appointing men to inferior offices who turn out to be fit for higher ones.

Churchwardens, relieving officers, guardians of the poor, these are some of the offices which more nearly express the duties of the first deacons than the modern diaconate does; and it would be a little shock to modern sentiment to insist that candidates for these offices should be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. There would be few men to whom it would not appear fantastic to demand or expect such a heavenly gift for some of these duties.

But there are many signs in our day of the same desire which possessed the Apostles to separate the lower and the higher functions in the work of the clergy. And this theory of duty, strange to say, exists side by side with a growing necessity imposed on the clergy of undertaking all sorts of work—much of it of the very same kind as the first deacons were ordained to do. Notwithstanding the lesson of the origin and history of the diaconate, men are found who talk with some contempt of “table-serving,” and of “secular” ways of doing good, as if we had any faculties for judging of the relative importance of the “different administrations of the same Spirit.” And supposing it were possible to do this—*i.e.* to judge of the relative importance of the manifold duties a clergyman has to do in these days—it would be impossible to deny the importance of any one of them, or to measure it.

The clergy are expected to work for the good of men in every way ; to cultivate mind and heart, feelings, will and emotions ; to study the laws of health and disease ; to provide counteractions for the influence of occupations or dwellings on the majority of most of their congregations. This is because every man is such a complex being that they do not know how to approach him, nor what influence is most likely to affect him.

Very few clergymen have the chance of doing what the Apostles did or hoped to do, *i.e.* of leaving all secular business to be done by others, and giving themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. Some, probably, consider this a misfortune and a drawback. It is more likely to be a great blessing and help to themselves, and to both departments of work in which their life is spent ; for no one can doubt that it would be a misfortune for most parishes if the clergyman gave himself wholly to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It is easy to imagine this without enlarging on details ; but the damage to his own character from this separation from all the interests and associations of his flock would be instant and obvious. It would not only not tend to make him less worldly, as the phrase is, but it would intensify all the worldliness that was in him by confining all his thought on worldly interests to his own ; by cutting him from the great antidote to such worldliness, sympathy in the good of others. It would be no reproach to be worldly if the world were what it

ought to be ; and it is the work of the clergy to make it, by whatever means, more and more the kingdom of Christ as it gets older. They cannot do this by reckoning anything they can do for it as less than the noblest work, or by separating themselves from it as if it were not all God's world, and men were not all His children. It is doubtful whether even prayer and the ministry of the Word would not suffer from the same divorce—whether prayer could be as real, whether preaching could be as direct ; but it is certain that this separation of sacred from secular functions in the work of the clergy would give a sanction to opinions always too ready to show themselves.

Nothing could be more mischievous both to Christianity and civilization than anything which would tend to broaden or deepen the line that separates the things of the visible from those of the invisible world, the layman from the clergyman. Nothing is more hopeful in modern Christianity than the way in which the sacredness of all useful work is recognized, or than the unprofessional light in which it is regarded. Good works are no longer now regarded as the exclusive duty of clergymen. There are many ways in which laymen do much of what was either not done at all, or was done by ladies or by the clergy not many years ago. The distinction between the two orders is being obliterated in the way it ought to be, that is from the positive side, from the growing conviction in many minds that we all have an ordination at the hands of God to do His work here. It is being obliterated

not by clergymen becoming more like laymen, but by laymen, in this respect at all events, becoming more like clergymen. There is no sign that men wish to release the clergy from the obligations they have taken upon themselves, except by the formal way of act of parliament; for side by side with this assertion of the laity that all the Lord's people are prophets, and have a right to labour in the vineyard, are stricter claims upon the clergy, higher demands upon their thought, upon their spiritual life, upon the elevation and discipline of their character. We have passed from the sphere of the magical into that of the spiritual in our conception of their person and office.

Perhaps there never was a time when the official pretensions of the clergy as a body were, on the whole, so low in comparison with their personal influence, as at present. Their influence cannot be measured by the extent to which men admit their miraculous powers or their mysterious commission; for these have been freely acknowledged when their social influence has been at zero; but now that it is felt that their influence is the same in kind as that of all men in whom God has put His Spirit and the will to work for others, we feel that modern analysis has driven them from an insecure position and founded them upon a rock. Not less but more is exacted of men who venture to occupy such a position, and the more the real ground of the sacredness of this calling is acknowledged, the more likely are we to see all needless

barriers and distinctions removed that separate the two orders in a Christian state.

We already see our priests and deacons among the most active at serving tables; may we not look forward to a time not far off when some of our table-servers shall imitate the example of the first seven, and preach Christ with wisdom and power?

There are signs of the possible realization of this community of office; symptoms, if not of the abolition of all distinction, yet of a time—as some think—when the clergy shall cease to be a paid order of ministers, and shall imitate some of the earliest preachers of the Gospel in working for their living with their hands (or with their heads, as some of them do now), and being chargeable to no man. We are probably a long way from this state of things, which some hope and others dread, and meantime in many churches in England financial affairs are in a very bad way. District churches have neither the freedom of unestablished communities nor the emoluments of endowed churches. They have neither the security of an established religion nor the zeal of the voluntary system; for this reason, because financially they are in the same condition as a nonconformist chapel, and yet the persons who attend them belong to an establishment. To belong to an establishment is to grow up with the notion that your religion is provided for you; that you have as much right to a seat in your parish church, and to the benefit of the services performed there, as you have to a seat at your

own tables—which is true. District churches however are not parish churches, and they have not the means of providing seats and services gratis. But we have been brought up to expect our public worship as a free gift, and it is hard to divest ourselves of these associations. We forget the new population that has sprung up in England since the tithes were settled on the Church; and since the investments for money were created which are at once effect and cause of the new class. Whatever may be the proportion that all the other capital of England bears to the value of the soil, it pays nothing (except by way of voluntary offering) to the National Church, while the land pays a tenth of its produce; and this is a fact which should be borne in mind by all who derive their incomes directly or indirectly from other capital. The result of belonging to a National Church is that we have not been brought up to give to our public worship. We give freely to other things, but while we are most exacting about the character, ability, and work of the clergy, we have no idea how to pay them.

The case is quite different with Nonconformists. It is a tradition with them to support their ministers, and they do it on a scale which shames us. Three or four dissenting chapels in and about London might be named where the congregation guarantee their pastor much more than the value of an exceptionally rich benefice, free of all trouble and all charge for the services; and on the other hand, what is the history

of almost all district churches, of all but a very few free and open churches? Is it not a constant record of underpaid clergy, and a perpetual debt to the church-wardens? There are very few unendowed churches in London, except those that are especially attractive from their ritual or preaching, which pay their way, and give a decent income to the clergyman. People who go to church and see everything as they like to see it, forget who pays for all these things, or think the clergyman the proper person to pay for them. A little calculation would convince them that, after the expenses of the church are paid, there must be little or nothing for the clergy. Any one who would take the trouble to go into the accounts would be convinced of the truth of this, and would find that the churches where all the seats are free are as a rule the worst off.

The whole subject ought to be considered independently, and on its merits, and not according to conventional notions or established customs, and men ought to ask themselves who are the proper persons to bear these expenses, and what proportion they severally ought to contribute. Evidently much more than it is the custom to give now.

People would be slow to confess that the small sum paid in pew-rents represents at all their sense of the advantages of public worship; or that the income arising in most cases from this source to the vicars of district churches is a fit remuneration for the brains and the work of such men; or that the personal, as distinguished from the real property of this country,

pays anything like its fair proportion towards the support of the established religion of the land ; or that what they individually give represents their thankfulness for “all the blessings of this life,” or that it is at all consistent with the profession of gratitude they make every Sunday for “the means of grace.”

BRIDLING THE TONGUE.

ST. JAMES i. 26.—“*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.*”

THE Epistle of St. James is very unlike most of the other writings of the New Testament. It deals very little with the comforts or the hopes of the Gospel; very little with the appeals or the encouragements, with the arguments or the inferences, which St. Paul and St. John base on the facts of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. And it does not touch at all on the theology of the gospel history. It is a protest for morality, and it may have been called forth by the very sense of freedom which the gospel awakened in its first converts, and the license into which it betrayed them; and so may be compared to St. Paul's appeal to the Thessalonians, not “to use their liberty for a cloke of maliciousness;” or the writer may have seen the Jews to whom he wrote sharing in the general corruption of manners which characterized the time. It is in character both more ancient and more modern than gospel writing or teaching. Its denunciations of one vice after another

are like the woes of Isaiah or Ezekiel against the vices of an advanced civilization. And they are like the earlier utterances in their abrupt transitions and unconnected warnings. St. James is the prophet of the apostolic epoch, with whom "to obey is better than sacrifice," and "to do justice and to love mercy" is what is required of a man. And if, in his threats against oppression and servility, against falsehood and boasting, we are reminded of the old teachers of Israel, it must be allowed on the other hand, that his definition of pure religion, his condemnation of evil-speaking and of partisanship, his protest for the Giver of every good and perfect gift, remind us at a great distance, and in spite of many differences, of the moral teaching of Christ, and show where "the Lord's brother" had learnt his zeal for godliness, and his true intuition of Divine service.

But if his letter is ancient in its tone, it is modern too. It is in substance, though not in style, like a modern sermon; a sermon preached by a man who, thinking he had taught his hearers enough of the theology of their religion, set himself to apply it to practice. His analysis brings out fault after fault in character, and shows how false the view is; how pernicious the habit; how fatal the result; how vain all profession without conscientious practice; how necessary and wholesome is submission to the will of God. Nothing can be less like St. Paul's stirring appeals: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above;" "Walk worthy of the

vocation wherewith ye are called:" appeals which underlie when they are not expressed in the moral teaching of the modern preacher—than this catalogue of sins with their wrong, their folly, and their doom.

The circumstances of his life probably account a good deal for his mode of teaching. He lived in Jerusalem (and seems hardly ever to have gone out of it) when it was filling up the measure of its iniquity. In those last sad days which preceded its fall, his righteous soul was vexed by the sight of moral evils that the world has seldom seen surpassed, and his writing takes its tone from his experience. The place was corrupt with the corruption of a worn-out civilization, and accordingly the vices he denounces are not the brutal violence or the brutal excesses of savage life. But it was not the corruption of a Pagan town, like Corinth or Ephesus, whose religion encouraged foulness and sensuality; it was the degradation of a society which at its worst remembered that it was a witness against the abominations of the people about it; and it was the degradation of a religion which, with all its mistakes about God, had never thought that He would wink at personal impurity, or the outrage of domestic life. Again, it must be remembered that he lived in a large town. People were crowded together; thought and feeling were stimulated by personal collision to an extent unknown in smaller communities, or among the scattered population of the country. The sins he enumerates in his letter to

his scattered countrymen, and which he imputes to them, seem to be town sins; just those he would be likely to see in such a society as he lived in, where the husk of a religion was still the social basis and the dominant influence; where foreign rule had barred all the careers of ambition and all the outlets of energy, and the dammed-up forces spent themselves in rivalry, in jealousy, in covetousness, in formal religionism, in local partisanship, in slander and boasting.

His neighbours, he says, have lost the essence of pure religion in their ceremonies and wrangles; even in visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction they have failed, he hints, to keep themselves unspotted from the world. They have come to lay their sins at God's door, and to think that their party strife can forward His truth; as so many think still. They are servile and cringing to the rich, and supercilious to the poor. They have forgotten the common duty of speaking the truth, and the claims of party among them are stronger than the claim of right; they are slanderous and boastful. The same men who cried out that they were "tempted of God," had no thought of His providence as the ruling power of their lives. And he repeats once more the cry that was heard in Jerusalem, from Isaiah to Nehemiah, against the oppression of the agricultural labourers by the landowners who lived in the city. This was the curse of Judæa as of France and Rome; an aristocracy living in the capital, and leaving their

estates to be farmed by bailiffs, and the poor to be defrauded and oppressed.

His Epistle contains, besides, a strong exhortation to submission to the will of God, and to patience under persecution, which may perhaps help to fix its date; but this is a summary of the evils he sees about him in the capital, and it is against these that he warns his countrymen who are scattered over the towns of Western Asia, Southern Europe, and Northern Africa. This, it must be observed, is the teaching not of a prophet under the monarchy, nor of a moral preacher in the eighteenth century in England; but of an apostle, of the Lord's brother, in the first century of Christianity, when the Lord had barely left the earth, when the enthusiasm of His presence might be thought still to be kindling those who were called by His name. That name is hardly mentioned in the Epistle; only once after the dedication. From the beginning to the end there is hardly an appeal to a distinctively Christian motive. But it is easy to see how really Christian it is, how true its insight into the core of Christianity, how manful the anatomy which could cut down to the canker and expose it. He sees clearly enough that as the gospel is the revelation of a life, the religion of Christ must be a life and not a ritual; and the first warning, "Do not err, my beloved brethren," seems to accompany the exposure of every sin, and to remind the sinner who had a reputation for religion that his religion was vain.

This is easy to understand of the grosser sins, for no one could imagine a religious life to be consistent with cruelty, falsehood, or impurity. But it sounds like a wide and hopeless verdict to hear of a man who "bridles not his tongue," but deceives himself in thinking that he bridles it when he does not, that "his religion is vain." No more disheartening epitaph could be written upon a life than this. The waste of time is as nothing in the balance against wasted feelings and the long mockery of self. And yet it is this fault that is singled out as the crucial instance of self-deception among the many evils that seem worse ; as the poison that can blight a life among many that seem more acrid and noxious. And by no chance selection, for he quotes it again and again for warning and reproof. In one shape or other it is almost the burden of his letter ; and it is a suggestive fact that it presented itself to him as the most prominent temptation of a civilized society, so strong a temptation as to connect itself naturally with all their sins.

It shows his insight into human nature. For speech is the outlet and the expression of what is within ; and in civilized states, where action is restrained by law and custom, it is almost its only expression ; so that to regulate it is the essence of that self-denial, to practise which is to follow Christ ; to give it a loose rein is the self-assertion which is the denial of Him. And there is no temptation so enduring and universal. For there is no condition of

life, except solitude, where it does not arise. No age is too old or too young, no station too high or too low for it; appetite may fail or be satisfied, passion may cool, malice may weary, but the temptation to talk never fails.

The least harm that can come of constant yielding to any temptation is to make the character thin and frivolous. A very short experience of life will show that the worst that come of this one is to make it harsh or unscrupulous; false or censorious; arrogant or impure; in fact, to stamp it with that special fault to which the tongue is most commonly used to give expression; besides its effect of weakening self-control in other directions by opening a free channel to feeling and passion in one.

One value of this warning is that it introduces Christianity within the inmost sphere of life, and not only brings under its control a habit which, when it is neither false, malicious, nor impure, is not thought in general to have a moral aspect at all; but makes the regulation of it the turning-point of faith, the battle-ground on which is to be fought out the question whether we will follow Christ or the lead of impulse or of whim. If Christianity is not a profession but a character, everything that tends to weaken or to mar it makes or shows the profession to be vain; either vain as an untrue representation of what is within, or vain as an influence on the life it is meant to mould.

But there are two special points to be noticed in

this caution against an unbridled tongue. First, that the writer does not say that conversation which every one would acknowledge to be unchristian is the sign that a man's religion is vain. He does not stop to particularize self-assertion or ribaldry, misrepresentation or innuendo, falsehood or slander (which are faults of character expressing themselves through the tongue); what he condemns is uncontrolled speech of any kind, as tending by its action on character to counteract all the sobering and bracing effect of religious conviction and religious observance.

Indulgence of one kind begets weakness to control others; and this leads to the second and more important point, viz. that an unbridled tongue is not only a sign but a cause of the evil to which it gives expression. Faults of character finding this easy power of taking form in action are, if not produced, at least confirmed and intensified by it. The tongue being the readiest instrument to express all feeling, if it is uncontrolled, it makes as well as shows an uncontrolled nature. The character tends to grow like the expression of its transient phases.

The moral importance of this department of self-control is seen at once if it is shown to be the arena both for restraining and indulging vices which seem at first to be only accidentally connected with it; and the value of the warning is that it goes down to the fount of character and finds there a spring of action, which, branching into many streams, contaminates or enfeebles a whole nature with the varied

poisons borne on their currents. But even if the stream of talk be not poisonous but harmless, to yield to every impulse to it is a form of intemperance, and the result can hardly be much better than the reaction after any other stimulant. The end must be a character without composure, without reserve of energy, without self-respect. The habit is in reality self-assertion, because the desire is not primarily to give vent to certain views or feelings, but to give vent to self. Whatever are the individual feature or features of the self within, for the time being they become the whole man, and the desire to express them is an impulse of selfishness.

Thus dominant impulses tend by repeated indulgence to cover the whole ground of character. The tongue, for instance, being the readiest outlet of anger, breeds intemperance of the passion it expresses; utterance of falsehood weakens regard for truth; the habit of unfriendly criticism of the absent begets a pleasure in the failings of others; impure words breed again the unchaste thoughts from which they spring.

Such a tendency cannot be regarded merely as a peculiarity, not affecting a pure faith or benevolent activities; it is, on the contrary, the permanent ally of all that is evil within by its versatile power of combination with every besetting sin. For it not only stamps a man's character in his own sight, and makes the next transgression easier by the previous license, but it commits him to evil in the eyes of

others, and by destroying his self-respect, breaks down the last bulwark against temptation.

Nor is the account balanced by the opposite power of the tongue as the exponent of all that is true and pure and loving in the heart; for the tendency of words in strengthening and intensifying good impulses is by no means proportionate to their force in diffusing and consolidating what is evil. Under many circumstances their effect is quite the reverse of this; they may weaken the force of good resolutions, and waste the energy of virtuous impulses either by exaggerating them, or by giving them an apparent but unreal satisfaction.

Experience of the world soon teaches men that an unbridled tongue is ruin in affairs, and they learn to weigh the effect of words before they speak. Weakness and disorder come of it in a sphere where success can be measured and failure is obvious and unwelcome; but the slow degeneration of a spiritual nature, that is its sure result, is only marked by those who watch themselves, and the general failure along the whole career is hidden in the grave.

It may sound like the exaggeration which is commonly charged against preaching, to trace such a consequence to such a cause; but not so, perhaps, to those who have observed how a sore spreads in a character; how feeble violence of talk reappears in fitful purpose; how petty insincerities issue in self-deception; how the conventional antipathies and artificial enthusiasms of society sap reality of feeling.

Students of human nature will infer from hints like these that the moralist of the apostolic body took no superficial view of his subject when he despaired of the religion of the unbridled talker, and did not exaggerate when he said, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."

THE BOND OF MATRIMONY.

1 COR. vii. 14.—“ *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.*”

A GOOD deal of the inconvenience of what are now called mixed marriages was no doubt experienced by the early Church. Marriages of Christians with Pagans would of course sometimes occur, and conversions, most often probably of the wife, would occasionally take place after marriage. St. Paul seems to have acted very sensibly about them. If the husband and wife in such cases can agree to live together, he says, let them not separate on account of their difference in religion.

It would perhaps have been well if the same sort of moderation had prevailed in the dealings of some modern missionaries with their converts in polygamous countries. St. Paul recognizes the sacredness of marriage as an obligation independent of the profession of any religious opinion, and as one not to be disowned in consequence of any divergence. In countries where polygamy is or has been practised, it has not been in defiance of religious sanction or of the conception of marriage; but in obedience to the

one and with genuine, if mistaken, recognition of the other. To dissolve marriages conscientiously contracted seems opposed to the teaching of this chapter ; and to be as unwise as it is cruel to a number of women who entered innocently into them, and who break all their social ties and lose their home by an arbitrary dissolution of them. To sanction the formation of fresh polygamous marriages after the profession of Christianity would be unfaithfulness to some of its best teaching, and a deliberate sacrifice of one of the chief triumphs it has won. To be able to say that slavery and polygamy disappear before Christianity is to claim for it the credit of perhaps the two greatest forward steps in morality that have marked the progress of the world.

But it was no trifling concession that St. Paul made, and it was no slight conquest of his Jewish prejudices. Sprung from a race that would not eat with a Gentile, he suffers men and women to live together in the most intimate of all relations, between whom he could see a far more vital divergence than between circumcision and uncircumcision. He mastered a feeling as powerful as the prejudice which his fellow-countrymen have not overcome to this day. It was a proof of the large and human view he took of Christianity and of the sacredness in his sight of human ties. No one can take a higher view of marriage than St. Paul ; so sacred is it with him that he even permits this mysterious bond of spiritual and corporeal identity to remain unbroken between those

who to him were at the opposite poles of existence ; between those who confessed and those who denied Christ ; for to him to live was Christ. Few men in his circumstances and with his convictions would have had the courage and the largeness of heart to grant this liberty, or to recognize the superior claim of this great human tie to all obligations that might be entered into after it.

The same kind of difficulty about mixed marriages often arises now, but with less excuse ; for they are for the most part contracted between persons who do not differ as the Christian and the Pagan did by, what it is hardly an exaggeration to call, a fundamental difference of conception about good and evil on many practical questions. The parties to such marriages are for the most part both Christians, and differ little or not at all about the being and character of their objects of worship—but only about the mode of worshipping them. They can never have any difference about what is right and wrong in practice ; they must have the same hopes and aims ; salvation to them must mean the same deliverance from evil ; and they must look for it to the same Saviour.

But we hear lamentations over such marriages, as if they were calamities rather than inconveniences ; and we hear observations on them which show that a good deal more is thought of the profession of any religion than of the practice of virtue. For it must surely be granted that a man or woman would be a better husband or wife in proportion to their sincere

adherence to any form of Christianity. The disqualification or disadvantage would arise, not from the genuineness of the religious life, but from the zeal for the peculiarities of the sect; from what is human in religion that is, and not from what is Divine. It ought of course to be considered a much greater misfortune for a man or a woman to be united to a cold or indifferent professor of the same faith than to a sincere Christian of a different persuasion. But this is little regarded in comparison; and an excellent Christian character is not thought much of a make-weight against the drawback of belonging to a different Church. What is of the essence of Christianity that is of less account than its accidents.

The inconveniences that arise, not so much from these marriages themselves as from the view taken of them, are frequent and conspicuous. Questions arise about the education of children and the disposition of property which one cannot help thinking would hardly occur if the first devotion of the heart were to Him whose name husband and wife bear in common; if they could believe that the bond which unites them made them "heirs together of the grace of life," and was a channel of that grace to those who recognize its sacredness; if "the heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord" were thought of as one not to be squabbled about in law-courts, but as a cause as well as a sign of their unity; to be devoted to Him at all hazards, in whatever Church they might be reared. It is difficult to believe that, with a wedded pair

belonging to different Churches, many such cases would not find a loving settlement if love were there already; and if Christ, and not their own Church, were uppermost in their hearts.

We know what suffering—through no fault of their own—has been brought by persecuting laws on the partners in mixed marriages, and on the clergy who have performed the ceremony, even within the compass of the British Isles; and we cannot help trying, as we read of such things, to imagine what St. Paul would have thought of the Christianity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; how he would have mourned over the body from which the spirit had fled, as he saw men and women suffering social and legal disabilities for marriages with Christians differing only on points which he would not recognize, and Christian ministers punished for consecrating the union of those whose hearts were already one. He might even see a greater anomaly yet: for we have heard of wives and husbands separating from one another on account of religious difference; even of religious men, if not rupturing at least slighting the most solemn of all ties on the plea of the hindrance or inconvenience the presence of a wife belonging to a different Church occasioned them in their public work. The kind of wall of ice it raises nowadays between members of the Church of England and their former friends to join the Church of Rome is well known to every one.

Of course marriages between members of different

Churches are not the only mixed marriages in the world. If they were, as has been said, and both were Christians first and Church-people afterwards, the evil and inconvenience would be slight. But besides these, and leaving out of account for the present mere differences of character great enough even to make living together almost hopeless—the really fatal kind of mixed marriage—there is a growing number of marriages between women who believe and men who do not. And this arises from two causes: (1) because the nature of a woman is more disposed to religion; and (2) because men take more interest in the literature and the inquiries which have such a powerful influence on the religious opinions of the day. There must be many such marriages between men of all shades of religious belief down to agnosticism, and women devoutly orthodox. There must be many excellent husbands in the world about us who find themselves quite unable to accept the faith and the formularies of their wives. Perhaps no marriage would be more suitable for a man of this class than with a woman who was religious in the best sense of the word; who looked to God as the Father of men and to Christ as their Saviour from all evil, whether delusions of mind or defilements of body; who knew in her own heart (and was convinced that God must think) that sin was worse than intellectual error; and that belief in goodness without belief in the supernatural was beyond expression better than orthodox profession and a bad life.

The real difficulty (referred to before in the marriages of Roman Catholics and Protestants) that arises in these marriages, and is arising all about us, is how to educate the children. If a husband in such a position is sensible and considerate, he will remember how he arrived at his own doubts; he will confess that children cannot be brought up on negations; and that the only honest doubt is the result of individual inquiry. He will be generous enough to give his children the chance of his own experience of life, and the training that all their Christian brethren have; and he will not prejudge the case for them before they have a voice in the matter. He will feel that to bring them up Christians is not to prejudge the case; for men always advance towards liberty of thought and breadth of view from their earliest teaching; whereas to bring them up agnostics would, in almost all cases, be to shut the door behind them. Of course the difficulty would be only postponed; for children, as they grow up, see the difference in habits caused by difference of opinions. But the recognition of absolute divergence would come only when their minds were beginning to be capable of thinking and deciding for themselves.

Such a marriage is a difficult but a very noble position for a woman and for a man too. It is more easy to imagine than to set down the number of claims that would be daily made upon their generosity, their self-restraint, and their high principle. On the one hand the unbelieving husband might be

sanctified to a Christian holiness of character by the wife; on the other the pure life and the high tone and the righteousness of the man firmly believing in right and goodness, although believing in nothing else, might strengthen and elevate the woman who had much to strengthen and purify her which was denied to him. For it might be found by the orthodox wife of a sceptic that her husband believed that some things were duties which she ignored, and that some failings were faults, though she thought them venial habits of society. And the husband might learn by experience that his wife had a resource in times of trouble and temptation which his own convictions did not afford to him. There is no doubt that marriages of this kind are a growing difficulty in the world, and it is as well to consider what is our duty about them.

It must of course be the first of all duties to recognize the good there is in either party, to acknowledge its source and to believe in its inevitable tendency; to be convinced that those who believe in right and in one another have a broad and strong basis for their wedded life and must build on that, with frank acknowledgment of difference and good hope that each will sanctify the other by holding fast and living up to so much faith as they have in common.

For it is possible to conceive and to contract "mixed marriages" of a worse type than this, where the one party or the other, without denying what he cannot see, believes only in what he can. It is possible

to be agnostic of, or not to recognize, other objects of faith than the persons and events of Divine history. Truth and love, justice and purity may be the gods of the agnostic who has no other, and may be ignored by one who calls himself by the name of Him who to us is the incarnation of all that is noble in man. An unbelieving husband or an unbelieving wife may be one who believes neither in men nor women ; not in the marriage he has contracted ; not in honour, or kindness ; not in justice, or self-control ; not in duty, compassion, or mercy. He may be one who is either coldly self-absorbed by conviction, or grossly self-indulgent from want of self-restraint, or imperiously self-asserting, or heedless of any feelings or interests that stand between self and its gratification.

No doubt there are married persons of this class, unbelievers as real as the pagan consorts St. Paul wrote about. No one ever thinks their want of faith a reason for dissolving the marriage tie ; though it is a yoke harder to bear than difference of faith, which the hard or gross husband, or the cold vain wife, imposes on the partner's neck.

Here is an opportunity for the believing husband to sanctify the wife, for the believing wife to sanctify the husband ; and by the same means by which the believing partner amongst St. Paul's Corinthian converts was to sanctify the pagan spouse, viz. by exhibiting in life and conduct the strength of those convictions which are mere names to the unbeliever, whether they are belief in the creed of a Church, or

in whatsoever things are pure, true, just, lovely, and of good report. Is it not possible, by revering the ignored sanctions of wedded life; by asserting in life, and not in words only, the supremacy of slighted virtues; by patient continuance in well-doing; by the protest of conduct, not of speech—is it not possible for the believer in the unseen realities of human holiness to sanctify the believer only in what is seen? Is it not possible to reverse the issue of the Poet Laureate's description of such a marriage? He makes a slighted lover say—

“Is it well to wish thee happy?—having known me—to decline
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than mine!

“Yet it shall be: thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay.

“As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee
down.”

This is a picture of desecration, not sanctification; perhaps it is not uncommon, and not always the work of the man, though the process of a man's deterioration through his wife may be different. The ruling infirmities of either sex must of course be looked to as the prime causes of evil influence; what Tennyson calls the grossness of nature in the man; and the very evil the lover in his poem is suffering from, viz. selfish vanity and cold disregard of the feelings of others, in the woman. No doubt there are more homes that need to be sanctified by the believer's faith from evils such as these, than from modern in-

fidelity; and there is as little doubt that the task is harder.

It needs a strong faith to undertake it; a faith not only in the supremacy of goodness, but in its power to conquer; a patience not to endure only, but to wait and to hope; a courage not only to go on, but to resist "being lowered to his level day by day;" or a motive so powerful as the longing desire to sanctify the husband or the wife for the sake of the children which are the pledge, and ought to be the sacrament of wedded love—the outward and visible sign of the grace of true matrimony, a possession in common of what is dearest on earth to both.

It may be said that we bring such evils on ourselves; that marriages are made in haste; that there are few opportunities to people of knowing one another, even that there is a deliberate concealment of real character on either side; that selfish or sordid motives actuate both; that the influence of the man on the woman, and the woman on the man, is not good before marriage; that neither tries to discover, to evoke, and to foster what is noblest in the other; that the woman does not value the man or the marriage for his high qualities, or set a high ideal of life before him; that the man does not choose the woman always or chiefly for the crowning virtues of woman; that the effect of his attention is often to encourage the vanity which is her besetting infirmity, and not to elevate her to reality of study, work, or aim; that, in a word, people associate in an atmo-

sphere of affectation and unreality before marriage, in which antipathies and enthusiasms are equally artificial, and that nothing better can be expected than is seen often to be the result. Of course there is some truth in all this; and the truer it is the more manifest is the power of marriage to sanctify a union thus brought about; the more need of the conviction of this power to make it what probably a large number of marriages are, sources of joy, strength, and holiness to wife and husband. For by whatever means brought about and under whatever misapprehension, marriage, to those who use it right, will be always the means of a subtle and elevating discipline of character that can be gained in no other way. So elevating because the virtues of a social being find in it a sphere of voluntary exercise. Husbands and wives do not feel bound to "assume a virtue if they have it not," and in the privacy of home there is no "social pressure" to force them to be courteous, considerate and fair-minded. So subtle because some of the vital elements of happy wedlock are bred and nourished unconsciously. Self-restraint becomes instinctive in the perpetual presence of those whose relation demands it as a right. Self-denial is turned into indulgence when it is exercised for those who are nearest to self. Trust is naturally engendered by association with a life identified with our own. Homely virtues like these lead up to the highest level of associated life; viz. to sympathy, which is living in another's life, and is the sanctification of the husband or the wife who

may have begun wedded life without believing in marriage.

And besides the unconscious action of the state upon the man or woman, it supplies the most powerful of all motives to self-improvement. Wife, and children, or husband and children, are sometimes a check or stimulus to those whom nothing else can rouse or can restrain. "For their sakes I sanctify myself," has doubtless been the motive and the secret history of many a changed career. However the change comes, by unconscious action or by conscious effort, those who by being true to the spirit of marriage, seek their joy and live their lives in the joy and the lives of others, find that they have attained to the secret of the life eternal.

JOY AND SORROW.

2 COR. vi. 10.—“ *As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing.*”

It seems impossible to characterize the great facts of nature (of our own or of external nature), the qualities of the Divine Nature, our relation to Him and to one another, except in the language either of contrary or of contradictory statements. For instance, when we come to speak of the greatest of all facts—short of spiritual existences—space and time, though we find it impossible to speak of them either as limited or unlimited, yet in trying to think of them we find ourselves unconsciously combining these contradictory attributes. And how often is it true in conversation about great subjects, when one view has seemed for a time convincing and exhaustive, that it suddenly appears that the opposite view is true also, and we leave off trying to define as a whole what we can see in its details; or to harmonize truths which we can neither deny nor reconcile. It may be difficult or impossible in thought, but it is often the only possible mode of approaching a just conception; and in practice almost the whole of conduct depends on it. The problem of life, which so often arises in the shape of a decision

between opposing claims, is how to reconcile them. How to reconcile truth and love; how to reconcile justice and mercy, faith and reason, prudence and candour, duty to the individual with duty to society, duty to the seen with duty to the unseen. These come before us as intellectual puzzles and as questions of conduct; as high abstractions or as homely duties; but always hinting this, that we are in a state which is perpetually bearing witness to another order of things, in which such questions of intellect or of conduct may no more exercise us than it does now to see a noble character made up of opposing qualities; about which contradictory aspects may seem to have been the natural means of arriving at a true idea of it. The same state of things suggests not only a higher existence, but a higher order of intelligences, more like the Supreme Mind, to whom no one truth can contradict another; and a higher order of characters too, more like the Supreme Character, whose undivided perfection includes all knowledge and all virtues. It is hard to see how any man can doubt about his immortality who is familiar with these questions either of thought or conduct. They are proofs of a capacity which has no object here—indications of a moral nature which want of knowledge must leave undeveloped; a capacity which is, so to speak, an organ without a function; and the thoughts begotten of it are like springs that rise within us and flow away past our horizon, where we “cannot follow them now, but we shall follow them hereafter.”

And yet we never cease to be surprised every time we are puzzled afresh by some insoluble question, every time we are torn afresh by some conflicting claims; as if this was not the very condition of our lives. We do not always remember that such a state of things may be as necessary a discipline for a higher life as it is regarded by some to be a certain indication of it.

Just like this seemed all life to St. Paul—not only thought and conduct, but experience too; and he seems to have thought not only that all life was so, but that all life ought to be. He gives us his experience as a minister of Christ, and it is made up of opposites.

Every pair of these contraries would make the subject of an essay; every pair must be most true of the greatest men; of those who try most to live in the sight of God and to walk by the light of their own conscience. The higher men rise, the brighter will seem the light and the darker the shadow; but the contrast of light and shade must be strong in the lives of all who turn their thoughts inwards, upwards, outwards; who reason on the experience of life; to whom the fact of God makes any difference at all; whose attitude to their neighbour is not a matter of caprice or accident. Still there are few men who could say that “sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing,” was a true description of their life; always either sorrowful or rejoicing would seem more like the truth; the times of joy and sorrow are not the same, however quickly the seasons

follow one another. Men who have thought themselves above these moods have laughed at human nature and its childish quick-succeeding fits of tears and laughter, of joy unchastened by reflexion, and sorrow unillumined by hope; and we smile at the brief joys and griefs of children, while we seem children ourselves to those who have got beyond our level. It does not seem a matter to laugh at, but rather to mourn over; and to mourn over, not because there is so much joy and sorrow in the world, but because there is so little; because both joy and sorrow are so poor in quality and so small in quantity. The greatest capacity both for joy and sorrow belongs to the greatest natures; it belongs to all just in proportion as they exalt and expand their own. It is easy to rejoice in our own success, and people may be found who rejoice in the failure of others; it is easy to some natures (but not to all) to enjoy; but we do not rejoice enough because we cannot. We have been reproached as a nation with being very sad, and perhaps we deserve the sneer; but a capacity for enjoyment is not the same as the power of rejoicing: and perhaps we know as well how to rejoice as the countrymen of Froissart. But rejoicing is rare and difficult to all men. It demands high objects, however homely some of them may seem; it belongs to great hearts, and it must often live on hope.

There is no lack of occasions for joy, if men had the sympathy to detect and use them; but we miss half the happiness the world has to give us from want of

power to feel it. Even the happiness that art and nature offer to all are often presented in vain; and excitement or indulgence fills the gap that will not be left empty.

And what do most men know about such "rejoicing" as St. Paul's—the joy of watching men won day by day to a higher life; of watching the progress of the loftiest work; the joy of friends indebted to him for more than life; the joy of gratitude to God; of men's gratitude to him; the joy of the revelation of Christ in him; and the joyful hope of fuller communion still?

It is a great thing to be able to derive intense joy from friends, from books, from art, from children, from nature; it is hard to exaggerate the blessing of this Divine prerogative. But there must be higher joys; for it is possible to conceive a man rejoicing in a dungeon—friendless, childless, without hope, except from death; and his joy would be something like that with which St. Paul was "always rejoicing." To rejoice in the thought that God is a Father; that Christ is the true image of the unknown Omnipotent; that we bear His immortal nature; that, bad as things sometimes look, He is to reign till He hath put all things under His feet; that, with many drawbacks and with slowest progress, His law is beginning to sway the world, His example to form mankind; that our countrymen are rising every day to better conditions; that avenues are daily opening before them along which they may advance to all that men should reach

to ; that we ourselves individually belong to this great world-family as brothers, and to God as sons, and are conscious of these relations ; that we have been permitted to do the least work for Him and for them, and to see the labour of our hands ; that we are what each is, so born, so trained, so loved ; with minds for reflexion, with hearts for communion, with all the avenues of sense to receive impressions from without ; with spirits to receive impressions direct from the Invisible ;—here are reasons enough for joy, and the more we rejoice in them the wiser and better we shall be. Wiser, because we have learnt the relative values of things ; better, because fellowship in joy brings us nearer to our neighbours and to God. Much of our joy separates us from both.

It will, of course, occur to every one that there is another side to all these reasons for rejoicing. No doubt there is, and it is because of the manifold reasons for sorrow that men should learn to rejoice over the true occasions of joy. To remember how few of all His sons own God as their Father ; how few behold in Christ the ideal of the God they worship ; how few are true to the nature they share with Him and try to conform it to His ; how few of those who are called Christians give any sign of their allegiance except by a name and by conformity to a certain kind of worship ; to think of the unhappiness we bring on ourselves and others ; of the misery to which many seem as it were doomed from their cradle for no fault of their own ; of the failure

of our several lives compared with what they might have been ; of their negative results, their low aims, their poor interests, when they might have been redeemed to nobleness, even in the humblest lot ; to think of all the evils that might make angels weep ; and then to remember that it is not for these we shed the bitterest tears, but that mortified vanity or wounded self-love could wring our hearts more than any of them—this is to see why St. Paul sets it down as a token of a noble nature to be sorrowful, but still “always rejoicing,” because of the light behind the cloud, because of the measure of success in the midst of failure.

If there were more of such sorrow in the world there would be more rejoicing ; but both must expand from a narrow circle to a wider horizon ; both must begin where the old proverb says charity begins—at home. The charity that can “rejoice with them that do rejoice,” and “weep with them that weep ;” that can sympathize with the dulness and the anxiety, the pathos and the small interests of ordinary domestic life, and can illumine with the poetry of love the most prosaic home ; that can rise to self-forgetting cheerfulness on every innocent occasion of home-joy—this is the charity that, “smiling through its tears,” is most like the great Apostle’s, who could write that he was “always rejoicing,” even when men were hunting him to take away his life. Few households are without experiences varied and acute enough to give a power of sympathy in joy and sorrow that would

leaven and exalt the world, if it could only be carried out-of-doors.

It is this "mingled skein of joy and woe," this varied hue of human life, making its incessant calls on delicate sympathies, and finding them untutored respond, that our National Church, faithful to human nature, tries to represent in its annual round of seasons and of services. It is for this reason that it balances Christmas and Easter and Whitsuntide with the forty days of Lent, not intending that the joy should be unsanctified by thoughtfulness, nor the seasons of sorrow unredeemed by joy. By this allotment of seasons it endeavours to represent the mixed character of life as we find it, and to satisfy our instinctive craving after something in our relations with the unseen world to correspond to our experience of life. The Christian seasons of joy must be always tempered in thoughtful minds by the recollection of the Divine tragedy in which they are epochs; and to correspond to this is the element of sadness which is never wanting when friends and families meet together, and suggestive gaps mark how "one generation goeth and another cometh."

The virgin mother, when she went up in her pride with her Holy Child to the Temple, heard of the "sword which should pierce her heart;" and many a father and mother, before and since her time, looking on a child, have found the purest of all joys toned by the thought of the possibilities in store for him. Perhaps all the more refined joys have this suggestion of sorrow in

them, and for this reason they are as elevating as sufferings.

But there are pleasures which do not elevate and pains which give no strength. Common life, as we treat it, supplies little cultivation of the higher feelings to most of us ; affords few occasions of the pure joy of which we are capable : and so Easter and Christmas come, with their appeals to genuine human sympathies, to remind men of the joys of which they are partakers, to stimulate them to the discovery of kindred occasions of joy in the experience of daily life.

And there can be no better antidote to the carking care of small anxieties and small disappointments that waste and wear men, than earnest thought about what they are and what they were meant to be. It is a sort of natural counter-irritant to expel the sting of anxiety and disappointment by a healthier smart ; and so those who feel most nearly the need of a season like this are the men who see its naturalness, who know that it is their own fault if any time or condition is one of unmingled sorrow, and that no state and no season is all joy to thoughtful hearts. This is the very spirit of the Collect for Ash Wednesday ; it ushers in a time when we are called upon to be still and sober, to reflect and to be serious, by condensing into a sentence the most joyful news that ever was proclaimed to men : " Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent." How many

generations of men have yearned to be able to believe this ! What untold miseries have they brought on themselves and others because they could not ! It is wisely ordered that this gracious promise, which hangs like a garland over a gloomy porch, should accompany us all through Lent, because there can be no incentive to repentance so powerful as to be reminded day by day of the infinite worth of the Divine Love. It is an appeal strong enough to make us though sorrowful yet alway rejoicing, even under the sense of shame and failure and relapse. However much we may differ as a nation about the observance of such seasons, and as a Church about the mode of their observance, there are few persons of any seriousness of character who do not feel that such seasons must come to all natures that are not meant to sink ; perhaps many will think that it is wise to adopt the suggestion of an appointed one. However variously we may interpret the recommendation of an abstinence that is to subdue the flesh to the spirit (and it is left to each to determine what the manner of it shall be), there are few men who would say that such words have no meaning for them ; who would deny their consciousness of a higher part within them that was meant to rule the rest ; few whose experience has not taught them that the subjection of the lower and the dominion of the higher is the best state for them, and that the authority of the higher is increased by their own efforts to support it.

The need of this subjugation must, of course, appear

in forms and be suggested by incidents as various as are the characters and experiences of men, and as various must be the abstinence which is the lonely path to this self-mastery.

It would be foolish, because it would be false to men's consciences, to attempt to impose one routine on all. Most men who have thought at all have got beyond the need of drill in such details. They know only too well the ways and tempers that have made the fair ideal they have conceived for themselves as distant and hopeless as the effort to recall a dream; the call to "follow Me" sounds half like irony in the midst of settled habits and conventional morality. Men do not want teaching in such matters (which they know for the most part as well as their teachers) so much as motive, stimulus, occasion; they want something to lift them, and to brighten the uphill work of self-amendment. And the second Collect for this sad season (as we call it) is streaked with a ray of light, too; for it reminds us of what ought to be a source of purest joy; of Him who, "for our sakes," did more than we are asked to do, that He might lift us above all that shames and mocks and hinders, all that blinds and burdens us; above

"The passions wild and follies vain,
Pleasures soon exchanged for pain,"

up to a nobler and manlier life, where joy is refined by an abiding consciousness of the endless reasons for sorrow, and where sorrow, when it comes, is brightened by the permanent sources of joy.

TRUE ALMSGIVING.

2 COR. vi. 10.—“ *As poor, yet making many rich.*”

IN this and similar pairs of contraries St. Paul describes himself. They are epigrammatic in form, but in this as little as in any one of them could it be said that he sacrificed truth to epigram. His power of making many rich lay in the wealth of his own spiritual endowment, which enabled him to invigorate others with his own strength; to inspire them with his own hopes; to fill them with his own enthusiasm; to enrich others with the qualities which constitute greatness. Most people are poor in these gifts. Some of those who are rich in them lack the power of sympathy to share them with others.

We are not compelled to take his own word for the accuracy of this description of himself. He is evidently the animating spirit of the early Church; by friends and enemies alike he is regarded as the prop and genius of it. And his influence was not confined to his public life, and to its effect upon men in the mass; but he drew men to him by the force of a personal attachment, and had more devoted friends than any other man

mentioned in history. He is the only man in the Bible who has the more modern than ancient privilege of a large and intimate personal acquaintance. His greetings to the brethren; his private interest in his own converts; his affectionate mention of individuals; his warm gratitude to the faithful friends who shared his hardships; the crowd which "sorrowed most of all for the words that they should see his face no more," testify alike to his power of sympathy and to the need he felt of it himself. The hard life he led; the great interests that were at stake; the unbroken consciousness of a presence in which he always lived, and of a Master to whom he owed a constant duty;—all these in a smaller nature might have produced a fanatic, an ascetic, or a recluse. But they left his heart none the less open to individual friendships, and were the means not of isolating him, but of surrounding him with a band of friends whom he inspired with his own principles, and who loved him above all for this, that he had made them like himself. He made friends by his power of love, and he made his friends great men by his power of communicating his own greatness.

No man ever stood up more strongly for the legitimacy of his title to be an apostle; but he quotes a different qualification when he wishes, as in this passage, to establish his position as a minister of God. A legitimate title by succession is beyond our control. In the case of some ministers of God it is in all probability historically true, but it can never be certain; in

the case of others, what we mean by a legitimate title is not pretended, though they have their own notions of their right. But however valuable lineal descent may be as a matter of order, there is a true apostolical succession resting on the graces of the chief of the Apostles, which all may emulate ; which will constitute all who aim at these graces his spiritual descendants, whether in or out of the line of descent. But much as St. Paul exalted his mission, perhaps no man would have been more surprised at the broad distinction between clergy and laity now. Perhaps no man would have been less likely to think that the qualities he ascribes to himself as a minister of God were intended for the imitation of the clergy alone. All Christians in his view are chosen, adopted, consecrated to set forth by their lives the glory of Him by whose name they call themselves. No duty therefore can be more binding on a society so gifted, than that of enriching others with the strength of those spiritual gifts which are at once the bond and the basis of their own communion.

All men cannot be spiritual prodigies like St. Paul, but it is the very inequality of the higher graces of character which is the constant guarantee of the need and of the opportunity of helping others with the strength and the light that are increased when they are shared. They cannot be imparted till we have them ; they grow by exercise ; and they come by personal contact with the Spirit of all, as good resolutions and a higher tone come from the society of good men.

They come that is in a natural way to all men, unless it is unnatural for the spirit of man to converse with the Spirit of the Father who made him in His likeness.

There is an unreality to most minds about theological language, when applied without modification to the experience of life; but there is no uncertainty about the existence of this gift of enriching others with the elevation and the purity of a noble character. Such rare natures are met with now and then, and they generally get into their right place in the world, by the force of their own character and because men like to give those the means of doing good who have the power. Characters like these diffuse a spirit of contentment and of truth, of courage and kindness through a wide circle by a sort of natural infection. But though there must be few who could influence none, there may be some who, if they would diffuse anything like strength or joy among their acquaintance, would have to turn their lives round and set out on an entirely new course. Like all virtues, a sphere for their exercise is not far to seek, for Christianity is a social religion; its characteristic grace is denied to the hermit; and no man's circle is so small as to contain no one that is not stronger or weaker, richer or poorer in what Christ calls "the true riches," for being included within it.

Men touch one another at many points; at home, in business, or in pleasures; and it is easy, without thought and conscientiousness, to sour homes by

reserve or harshness; to enervate them by indulgence; to dishearten those who serve us by exaction; to degrade them by the language used to them, and the services demanded of them. The privilege of the strong is to make life easier for those whom they control or influence or employ; to make it easier, not by lowering standards of conduct, but by raising motives of action; not by pressure or precept, but by example and encouragement to make duty easy and progress natural. But strength is often used in quite another way. It is only too common to see a strong will, by domineering, starve the natures of those who are subject to it. It drains them dry of hope and love and cheerfulness, when nothing but obedience is expected or exacted, and the lord and master is satisfied with that.

Meanness in money matters is one of the most unpopular of all faults of character, but it is perhaps quite as hateful to be niggardly of the gifts of the spirit as of the gifts of fortune, and certainly does far more harm. To reduce children or servants to a relation of mere obedience; to condemn those whom we deal with or employ to a pounds shillings and pence view of life and duty; to regulate friendships by fashion or interest; to brighten no lives; to elevate no motives; to strengthen none who are weak; to recall none who are wayward;—all this grudging of personal wealth to enrich the poor in spirit or in character is not perhaps unpopular, but it is a virtual denial of the Gospel and a sacrifice of the prerogative of humanity.

One had better have never been born. It is a way of life in which a man being rich may make many poor.

An instance of the evil effect of the influence upon the weak of those who are by education, nature, or training stronger (though it is often unconscious and generally well-intentioned) is sometimes seen in the work of those who take upon them, or are called to, the duty of visiting the houses of the poor; or are moved by conscience or compassion to give them their money. It is only too easy, being rich, to make many poor by such work, unless the basis of it is that personal sympathy which is the only instrument we know anything about at present for effecting personal improvement. All experience goes to show how mere gifts tend to impoverish and not to enrich. Giving without conditions and without that social relation which can elevate a gift into a kindness, have created a class in which gifts may be received without a sense of degradation; but they may degrade without the degradation being felt, and this is the lowest deep of all. The effect of such giving is to destroy independence and self-respect, to paralyze effort, and to make friendly relations between the rich and the poor impossible; for how can friendly visits be made when one side expects to be asked, and the other is hoping to receive? Difference of means ought to be no bar to confidence and friendliness; associating a gift with a call is a certain obstacle to it; and it would tend very much to more cordial

relations between rich and poor if gifts could be less inseparably associated with visits than they are; if visits were more generally paid only to those houses where they are known to be welcome; and if gifts were as far as possible a consequence and an expression of the friendly feelings produced by such intimacy.

The way we adopt with the poor is not the way men treat their friends or kinsmen. They do not feed the poor relations or scapegraces of their families from hand to mouth by small gifts, but try to procure for them the means of keeping themselves; they give to them, that is, out of the wealth of their minds or influence; and enrich them out of their personal store, not out of their purses alone. This is the way in which the "Father pitieth His children." He gives them brains or sinews to earn, and does not put bread into their mouths without work. But in helping the poor we are lavish of our money, but niggardly of time, of trouble, of companionship. These things we ought to do, and not to leave the other undone. There is abundance of need no doubt for money, but there is more need of the time and trouble of those who have heart and mind to know how to spend it wisely. The new doctrine that has ousted the old impulse to give to every beggar without inquiry, has its other side. The complement of it is that we should inquire, not that we should not give; but it insists that if we will not take the trouble to be sure we are giving wisely, we must not take

the responsibility of giving at all. It is easy to adopt one half of the new teaching and to turn the face from every poor man for fear of doing mischief; and probably, in the present state of the country, more harm would be done by giving than by refusing in every case. But those who give without inquiry must take the risk of swelling the great army of beggars and casuals that are the canker of the country; those who uniformly refuse all applications saddle themselves with the duty of doing some higher work for the recipients of the open-handed doles of a less reflective age. The great burden is laid on this generation of helping the helpless, not in their helplessness, but of helping them out of it; and it is work in which all may take a hand who have the kind heart and the clear head, and the strong will to do it. Men who make it their aim not to feed or clothe the hungry and the naked without any effort on their part, but to enrich them with the gifts that make their own labour sweet and their own life a joy—these “though poor, may make many rich.” Even those who think they have no gifts and no chance for doing this kind of work must see how its lessons apply to their own lives. The relation of estrangement between rich and poor has grown up from the same causes which produce estrangement in families and small societies, viz. want of communication of what is within us to those who are without. The same roof often shelters strangers in heart, akin in blood. There is conscientious provision on one side,

formulated obedience on the other; but none of the communion of heart and thought which enriches him that gives and him that takes.

And if it be thought that care of the poor is rather the work of the clergy than of the laity (though it has in fact got far beyond the power of the clergy, and if it had not is no more their especial work than the duty of all Christian men) it might be answered that these words of St. Paul express exactly what is their peculiar work, as distinguished from duties which they may share with all Christians. His friend, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, tells us that men were appointed to look after the poor, in order that the Apostles might give themselves to prayer and to ministry of the Word. This rather looks as if it was thought that the distinctive office of the clergy was different; as if their especial duty was to make many rich with the stores they drew from communion with the Source of all gifts of mind and character. They could have no higher part than this one, of cultivating themselves that they might satisfy others with their fulness, enlighten them with their light, and strengthen them with their strength.

It is of course none the less the work of all Christians to dispense such gifts, but it is a duty which lies heavily on the clergy to make many rich with them; it lies heavily on them as ministers of a National Church, which gives to all men the right to look to them for the best results that thought and prayer can

produce ; to learn from them the more excellent way of living ; to get some light about difficult questions ; something to soften and sweeten life ; something to raise thoughts above it ; something to make the years more fruitful as they fly ; something to look back upon and to look forward to when the end comes. It is common to hear of things done "to promote the glory of God ;" but the phrase is much less often applied to the influence of man upon man for good, than to some material addition to God's house or to the stateliness of ceremonial worship. It is implied of course that the glory of God is promoted by the gift or the ceremony through its effect on men, and it is also significant that this is not the first thought. But in truth we know no other way of promoting His glory than by making men better ; and all beauty and dignity of church or worship are good only so far as they advance this end.

It is implied in the very terms of this description of one of the effects of character that it is the privilege of the poor to exercise it, and it is easy to perceive their advantage ; for they are not hindered by the undoubted difficulty which wealth causes to the purely spiritual influences of man on man. The spiritual influence of the rich and powerful must often be weakened to their own or other minds by the dread or by the consciousness of the presence of interested motives to mar, if not to neutralize, the direct action of spirit on spirit.

It is hard for the rich to be sure of the true

source of their influence ; hard for those who listen and follow the teaching of men who have much besides the weight of character to give force to their recommendations, to be sure enough of their motives to preserve their self-respect.

The moral effect of wealth, apart from the influence of character, is probably not good on the world ; it needs a counterpoise, just as narrow means require the dignity that comes from a sense of power of some sort. The Apostle's words seem to point out to the rich a way in which they can counteract some of the influences of a large distribution of wealth ; and to the poor a path of usefulness wide enough to make up for the want of material power. If riches give a man many chances of cultivating natural gifts into handy instruments, and of training his longings and his powers into an art of raising and purifying men ; the poor start with fewer difficulties, and their example and appeals go straighter home. On all the duty presses, as we pass through life, to lift and to console ; to brace and to purify. Some find their personal habits in the way of bettering others ; or are staggered to find those they seek to improve already better than themselves. Circumstances are too strong for others, and condemn them to a life that seems to demand an attitude of distance and repression towards their fellow-men, and to forbid personal contact altogether. But spiritual laws refuse to regard personal habits or exceptional circumstances ; they maintain their unvarying exaction ; they leave it to us, in seeming

irony, to aim high or to settle down ; promising no reward but the sense of having tried ; holding out no threat but the supreme compunction of having lived to please self and having failed in that.

Behind the eternal laws is the loving Father calling us to the true life of sons ; and the gracious Son wooing us, by the example of perfect manhood, to live the noblest life of men.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN.

2 COR. vi. 10.—“*As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*”

It was because St. Paul, though having nothing, yet possessed all things, that he was able, though poor, to make many rich; for there are possessions of which a man loses none by sharing them with others, just as there are possessions which the giver is the poorer for parting with and the receiver none the richer for obtaining. He had been telling his Corinthian friends of his qualifications as a minister of God and as a minister of men; and it is instructive, when qualifications different in kind from these are put forward as the essentials of the Christian minister, to note what they are. They may be read in the half-dozen verses which precede the text; and any one who reads them may see plainly that they are graces and virtues and works which distinguish a Christian from one who is not a Christian, and not those which distinguish an office-bearer in the Christian Church from the general body of Christians. They are an enumeration of gifts exercised, of works done, of sufferings endured; they not only show what an essentially

Christian minister St. Paul was, but they are a refined intuition of what a Christian minister ought to be, which may well make any man despair who aspires to the same position. For they show him not only how far he is behind his own ideal, but that there is a conception of the character which never could have occurred to him ; which he finds it hard to enter into ; almost hopeless to make his own when he has mastered it.

It was almost literally true of St. Paul that he "had nothing," for we find him labouring with his own hands at a humble trade to support himself ; and no doubt this absolute personal independence, of which he seems to think a good deal, was a great help to him. It saved him from all suspicion of interested motives, for it showed that he had nothing to gain from preaching the gospel ; and it must have made a deep impression on the poorer people to see a man of great endowments and large reading living as they did, while he seemed to belong to another world ; so far above the level of their lives, though not above their comprehension, were the heavenly truths he taught them. There are men of great gifts and careful training nowadays who preach the gospel almost for nothing, but they do not live as St. Paul did ; perhaps our Church would be more the Church of the poor than it is if some of them did. They may be as disinterested as he was—probably many are ; but the experiment of "having nothing" for Christ's sake has seldom been tried in our Church, though it has been

tried, and with some success, in others ; and wherever it is untried there must be felt, as a want, the inexperience of the effect of that sharp contrast between the material poverty and the spiritual wealth, the "having nothing" of visible things and "possessing all things" invisible, which made a large part of the force and of the magic of the preaching of St. Paul. "Having nothing" is of course a qualification with which a man may easily invest himself, and without gaining any of the possessions which "make many rich ;" though it is likely that St. Paul's poverty made easier to him that sympathy which was the means by which he shared with others the abundant stores of his own ardent and spiritual nature. "Who is weak, and I am not weak ? who is offended, and I burn not ?" "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing ;" "As poor, yet making many rich ;"—these are hints to us of the wealth a man may have who owns nothing. They are instances of blessings which money cannot buy, and of which it cannot make men independent. They are an encouragement to hope for our race when we are inclined to despise or to despair of it ; and they point out paths of Christian progress in which all may walk ; in which especially those who claim to be successors of St. Paul are bound to exercise themselves.

He did not see the full scope of his words, or guess when, as the first Christian who set foot in Europe, he landed at Philippi, that he was to be the great apostle of civilization, and of the races whose

duty it seems to be to evangelize the world. He did not see how wide his words were when he spoke of making many rich ; he did not know that for thousands of years after he thought the "end of all things" would come, he would go on inspiring generation after generation of Christians with the fire and the tenderness of his own nature, and enriching them with the wealth of his knowledge, of his sympathy, of his faith, and of his zeal. It is not given to many men to own such property as this, and to fewer still to be able to entail it on posterity ; but it is something to have a high aim set before us ; to see the Christian life, as taught by Jesus of Nazareth, lived out before our eyes ; to have it expanded into details, easier to practise than it is to be guided by first principles ; to discern the wealth that may lie hid beneath the cloak of poverty ; and to be obliged to own, in spite of our appreciation of the powers that wealth confers and the comforts it can purchase, that these are the true riches.

For it is possible to find men now, and it has always been possible to find them, of whom it would be true to reverse St. Paul's description of himself, and to describe as "having all things, and yet possessing nothing." For St. Paul makes a difference between "having" and "possessing," and speaks of himself as possessing the undying qualities that make up character, and as holding, as we should say, only a life-interest in things visible, of which he had actually none. What a man possesses in St. Paul's sense he

can never lose, but many things may deprive him of what he only holds. Long before death comes he may find that there are things which wealth cannot purchase. Love and health and honest friendship, even pleasure, are not to be bought, though they come unsought and unbought to those whose character is the storehouse they have stocked with treasures that "no moth corrupteth, neither thief approacheth." Whether a man is dependent on sympathy or not, he soon finds out that he is not independent of the hidden treasure of a cultivated mind, of disciplined affections, of elevated tastes, of impulses and emotions regulated and refined. These are a true possession that makes the visible things of less importance in their absence, that doubles the value of them when both are found together.

A man with none of the powers of which he can acquire so many is said to have "no resources in himself." Not only is he unable to be of any use to other people, but he cannot even be sufficient for himself. Nothing can more plainly show the helplessness of such natures than the complaint often made by idle people that they "do not know what to do with themselves." A confession not only that they are no use to their neighbours, but are even unequal to the burden of consciousness. Time is their enemy; and they are so empty of all imperishable possessions that they cannot even live without the help of aids and appliances that many conditions of life even now deprive them of, to say nothing of a more purely spiritual

existence in which it can hardly be supposed that such resources will be found. A man might get a very good notion how he would stand the loss of all things, and of the sort of store he had laid up against such a risk, by the temporary loss of his accustomed pleasures and defences against *ennui*. It might be occasioned by enforced solitude, by an accidental confinement to a sick-room, by a sudden disappointment of some expected pleasure which would make everything else seem without flavour or colour for a time.

A picture, striking from its broad contrast of light and shadow, of such helpless emptiness may be seen in the accounts of criminals stopped in a career of crime and of fierce if coarse excitement and suddenly shut up alone in a cell, to feed themselves on such food as their own meditations supply, and with nothing to stave off or stupefy the thoughts they hate. Our thoughts may not poison, but they may be very meagre food; and when we are thrown back on them, or on such resources as we have been able to create for ourselves, then is the time to take stock of the true riches, and to find out what we have got in fee-simple, and what in life-interest only; what proportion of all the furniture of body, soul, and mind which we have accumulated here will resist the influence of poverty, solitude, sickness, and disappointment; for so much and no more will survive death. Only a little more will last till death comes, for few men can carry their enjoyment of material things to the edge of the grave. There comes a time to most men when the only plea-

asures are pleasures of the mind and the joy of the heart that belongs to those who can be happy in the joy of others.

To lay up treasure when the brain is active and the heart is soft that will bear such interest as this in old age would be a true "life insurance;" an investment that would insure the future against all that sometimes makes us fain to draw a veil before the last stage of an active life, and would make it as rich in its peculiar graces as the best years of youth and manhood. An old age may sometimes be seen for which such provision has been made, and a beautiful sight it is; perhaps it is no harder to secure it than to secure a competence for it, and to leave a competence behind for those who are to follow. Some of the purpose and the foresight that are spent on seizing on opportunities for making a fortune would produce great results if they were applied to making the most of men.

Whatever kind of old age is awaiting each man, or whether any kind is, one event in every man's life is certain, for which, if he tried to realize it, he would find that he was making less provision than for any of the contingencies against which prudent men are careful to protect themselves. The literature of all ages contains warnings that "a man can take away nothing with him when he dieth, neither can his pomp follow him," and this is forcibly expressed in the homely words of the Book of Job: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return." This

nakedness is what all must experience when they go on that journey alone. It is a feeling hard to realize now, when excitement makes up for the want of thought; when indulgence can occupy the place of affection; when people can secure companionship if they cannot make friends; when there is no need to withstand inclinations that can be indulged, or create internal resources when they can buy external distractions. It is hard to realize; but, as has been said, there are conditions which should warn a man who thinks, of what may be coming, and should make him ask himself what would be left to him of all the joys that make him love his life, if he were suddenly parted from the body which is the channel of so many. "Of that day and of that hour knoweth no man;" and it is a trial to most men to think resolutely about it; each only knows that it must surely come.

It seems natural to pass on to the next thought—that each must be then what he has made himself. Some will find themselves "poor indeed" when the sudden change has dried up all the springs of their life; has cut off all their supplies of pleasure; has banished them from all their interests; robbed them of all the excitement that made them blind and deaf to the warnings of their own true poverty in the midst of their wealth of all things. We get warnings of this nakedness every time we find solitude oppressive, or confinement tedious, or sympathy difficult, or intellectual pleasures vapid, or affections cold.

We are warned to make a fairer division of time and energy; to spare for nobler acquisitions, some of all the will and all the time that are consumed in England in laying up treasures that moth and rust can corrupt; to devote a larger portion to garnering the true riches that will save us some day from describing ourselves in bitterness of spirit as "having all things, yet possessing nothing." Old men may be seen going on to the verge of the grave accumulating wealth, who seem to those who have much less to have enough and more than enough for all the pleasures that life can give them; and we are tempted to ask, Why cannot there be a time to stop? Is there no such thing as enough? Is there no higher ambition or pleasure than accumulation?

It is hard to imagine the blessing to this country if some of all the force of character and brain which are devoted to making money, long after huge fortunes are already made, were given to public affairs; to steady efforts to improve the general condition of our fellow-countrymen; to holding public offices which, except the county magistracy, are almost all refused now except by inferior men. There comes a time to many men when such a change would seem to be most elevating to their own character; most satisfying to their own ambition; most beneficial to their countrymen. The interests and the sympathies that would be awakened by such occupations in those who took part in them would in time perhaps stir some of them to try to remove a slur that is often cast on the owners

of great wealth in England, viz. that while so many contribute liberally to charities, so few devote great sums to magnificent or useful public works.

And not only do the old seem to leave off too late, but the young to begin too soon. Youth is the receptive time, and the mind and character should be stored with as many impressions as can be printed before the character hardens, so that life may have some other interest than that of getting; and that men, when they leave off getting, may have other resources and not be helpless, as we hear they are, not only because the excitement of accumulation is over, but because they have never felt the fascination of other interests. It is probable that necessity cannot always be pleaded for sending young men so early into business: there are other riches besides those that come from commerce, and youth is the time for storing them; and "it cometh not again." To learn all that can be learnt, to see all that can be seen; to get a wider knowledge of their fellow-countrymen by studying the opinions, by sympathizing with the interests and occupations, and by working for the good of the more numerous classes; to extend their acquaintance among the gifted, the thoughtful, and the influential few; to cultivate friendships and affections that can grow freely where there is no poverty to stunt them,—these are some of the advantages that wealth can secure for the young; privileges that some covet who do not envy it its indulgence or display. Can we not all think less of what is without, and more of what is

within ; less of what a man has, more of what he is ; more of what we can do for others, less of what we can buy for ourselves ; more of what each is in his own sight, less of the opinion of his neighbours ; more of joy, and less of enjoyment ; more of deserving the love of men, and less of winning the favour of society ; more of enriching and endowing the divine nature that is at once the special and the universal endowment of all men and less of an accumulation of wealth that knows no end, even after all the lower wants and all the higher longings have been provided for ? —so that, even if we are poor, we may make many rich ; and if we are rich, may find, when all our wealth is left behind, that though we have nothing then, we are yet in possession of all things.

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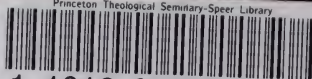
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